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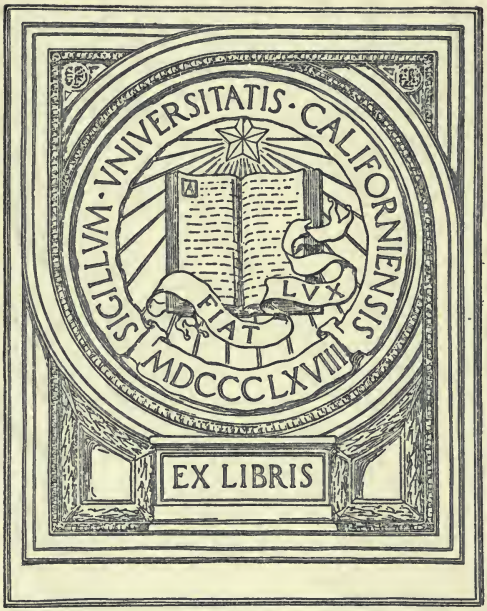

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CHARLES CHESTERFIELD,

OR THE

ADVENTURES

OF A

YOUTH OF GENIUS.

BY

MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHORESS OF

"THE WIDOW BARNABY," "THE WIDOW MARRIED," "MICHAEL ARMSTRONG," &c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

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THE

LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF

CHARLES CHESTERFIELD.

CHAPTER I.

Charles Chesterfield is worse off than he thinks for in many ways—A Lecture on the Art of Reviewing—Charles rebels against *The Regenerator*, and is banished—Various Love Passages—Financial Difficulties—An Amorous *Dénouement*.

Of the trio thus debarred from tasting the sweet breath of summer, Charles Chesterfield was the least discontented; for the moral infliction had as much of novelty for him in many

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respects now, as when the heat, the dust, and the din were hallowed by fashion. Vauxhall appeared to him the realization of the most brilliant fables of the Arabian Tales, Kensington Gardens a royal Paradise, Richmond a courtly Arcadia, and the river Thames an unceasing regatta, on which the barge of Cleopatra seemed ever before him, when the Lord Mayor or any of his golden compeers "disported on its azure wave."

It certainly did happen, sometimes, that the poor lad felt exceedingly tired of Mrs. Sherbourne, and her engrossing love; but he was too young and too gentle-hearted to let this feeling keep him away from her, as he truly believed it would break her heart if he did. The lady, however, like most others, was as quick to perceive the fading of the passions she inspired, as the growth of them, and was perfectly aware that the young poet was tired to death of her. But this was a matter of the most perfect indifference. As long as it was certain that in a few months he would be in possession of four thousand pounds in ready money, so long it was certain would her fond attachment last; and the only question in her mind was, whether it would be wisest to marry,

and make him responsible for her debts, or lead him to elope with her to the continent, and there enjoy, as Mrs. Chesterfield, the satisfaction of expending the money without shackling herself by any ceremony which might render the connexion troublesome when it was gone.

There were many reasons which led her decidedly to prefer the latter course, and there is little doubt she would have adopted it, had she not perceived such decided symptoms of recovered reason in the young man as led her to doubt her power of inducing him to take the spirited course she meditated. It was then that she blessed the forethought which had taught her, when his madness was at its height, to extract from him a note containing an explicit promise of marriage. She now examined this with very technical exactness, and finding it perfectly satisfactory, relaxed so visibly in the *exigeante* demonstrations of her attachment, that Charles gradually began to fancy that he had recovered his liberty; and rejoicing in the idea that his chains were falling from him by degrees, his spirits rose, he felt his poetic Pegasus, which of late had drooped and stumbled, again curveting under him, and determined to attempt some higher flight than he had yet dared.

He omitted his usual call in Mount-street, and repaired to the dark and dusky second-floor of his friend Marchmont.

He found the Regenerator rather gloomily plodding over the pages which were to constitute his next number.

"Oh!—It is you Chesterfield, is it?" he said, as the door opened, and the gay countenance of the half-enfranchised prisoner appeared before him. "I am glad to see you—and you look, too, as if you were up to every thing. See here! these tales of yours are capitally good, and quite in the right style of passion. Too mystical to be generally attacked as *trop fort*, and yet sufficiently Byronic to please. But I think we have gone on long enough with them; and now I want you to start off upon something perfectly new."

"You could not say any thing that I should better like to hear, Mr. Marchmont," replied Charles eagerly. "I have been meditating for two or three days past on a narrative poem that I should like to write in numbers. Quite new that, isn't it?"

"Yes, upon my soul, and devilish good too; and if you will let me go shares, half-and-half, I'll undertake to find a publisher for you. But

this wont help on the Mag., you know, I must get something out of you for that. I have been just thinking that you have never yet tried your hand at reviewing. I want to take 'Cassandra' and the 'Book to Broadstairs,' and therefore I must get you to run me off a few spirited notices on all the books set down in this list."

"I have no objection to try my hand as a reviewer," replied Charles, rather gravely. "But let the works be as light as they may, there is a terribly long quantity of reading here, particularly as I have just taken it into my head that I should like to begin something else."

On hearing these words, Marchmont burst into a violent fit of laughter. "What a green-horn you still are, Chesterfield, notwithstanding all the trouble I have taken to enlighten your ignorance. Do you really, truly, and *bonâ fide* believe that the almighty confraternity of WE read the books that they review?" said he. "A pretty life they would lead. Do you really believe this?"

"Yes, certainly I do," replied the young man, "for I don't see very well how they can escape it."

"Don't you, *mon cher*?—Then I will show

you," said Marchmont, opening one of the teeming repositories of his writing-desk, and drawing thence a sheet of paper. "Here is a list; read it aloud, and you shall have my commentary afterwards."

Charles obeyed, opened the paper, and read as follows:—

"1st. *Thoughts on a Future State of Existence.*—Execrable. Bigotry. Intolerance. Nineteenth century. Stumbling-block in the progress of thought. To be done savagely, but jocosely.

"2nd. *The Tyranny of Passion*; *or*, *Absolution by Right Divine.*—Admirable. Courage of truth. Strength of argument. Irresistible reasoning. First-rate talent. Commanding intellect. To be done in a high transcendental tone of enthusiasm.

"3rd. *Lucinda, or the Lost and Found.*—Unequalled felicity of style. Mingled purity and warmth. Interest that never flags. Decidedly the most popular novel of the season.

"4th. *Mary Anne.*—The author of this work well known, but little valued. Total deficiency of enlarged views. Contracted mind. Behind the age. Neither interest, excitement, nor philosophy."

Charles laid down the paper, and said, "I

comprehend you now. You have read and passed judgment on these works yourself; but being pressed for time, you wish me to embody your thoughts, thus succinctly expressed in articles of the usual length."

"You are just about two-thirds right, and one-third wrong, Mr. Chesterfield. I have decidedly passed judgment on these works, but most assuredly I have not read them; and I do wish you to embody my thoughts, as you call it, in articles of the usual length."

"You don't mean to tell me," cried Charles, "that this omnipotent business of reviewing of which I have heard you speak in language so sublime, as of a power which, though wielded in secret, might vie with the bolts of Jove in its irresistible greatness,—you don't mean to tell me that it is all humbug, and that books are admired or condemned solely by chance, without having been ever read by the reviewer at all?"

"By chance?—O no! my dear fellow, not by chance, most certainly. God forbid that I should belong to so extremely childish and unprincipled a community. To review books by chance, would be about as absurd as I hold the occupation of the great trimestre critics to

be, who, for the most part do, it is said, actually read the books they review. Chance has much less to do, believe me, with us than with them. They may chance to be in a good humour or they may chance to be in a bad one; they may be full of wine, or full of pudding, and moreover they may be utterly incapable of judging wisely in any state, and so be pretty sure of blundering in all. But such tripping and stumbling can never happen among our set, our principles are immutable, our judgments ever clear, all we require to know is the name of the author in all cases where the name is known, or the principles in which he writes where it is not. This is sailing by a compass that cannot fail us, my dear Chesterfield, and is an occupation as much superior to the pitiful employment of dissecting, analysing, and pretending to understand and judge the magnificent mass of literature poured forth by our groaning press, as turning a thousand spindles by a steam engine is superior to the meddling labours of a grandam's distaff."

"Your system may be very convenient, Mr. Marchmont," replied Charles; "but you must forgive me if I say that I think its justice rather questionable."

"Forgive you, my dear fellow! Never doubt it; when a set act in concert, the discord of mere opinion is of no consequence; but as a matter of argument, I must point out that you are utterly mistaken in fancying there is any injustice in our system. Man to be great, Chesterfield, must never reason but on generalities; and if you view this subject *en grand* you will perceive a beautiful balance in the system, self-acting, and ever equitable, which places it incomparably higher, in a moral point of view, than any which rests on the wayward foundations of any human judgment. All the sages that have ever lived, whether sacred or profane, agree in proclaiming the fallibility of the judgment of man. We altogether escape from the mischiefs incident on this fallibility, for we do not permit the blundering faculty to have any thing to do with the matter."

Charles felt a movement somewhat resembling anger as he listened to the scoffing jestings of this ambushed stabber. But he was in high spirits, and after the struggle of a moment, permitted himself to laugh heartily at his patron's avowed rascality, and then said, "But, Mr. Marchmont, leaving morality quite out of the question, which I think will be the

safest way of treating the subject, I give you my word and honour that I should be quite incapable of working on this steam-engine principle. I can fancy it just possible that by dint of patient and attentive reading, I might be capable of concocting an honest sort of a review which should give a tolerably fair idea of the work under discussion. But how to make any thing out of those dashing rules of yours I don't know, so don't you think I had better set about something else?"

"Nonsense! if you mean to get on, you must conceive yourself capable of every thing. Besides, in this case, you are perfectly mistaken about the difficulty, nothing is so easy."

"It may be so to you," persisted Charles; "but I am sure I should never be able to string sentences together by which I really meant nothing. I really have no talent for it."

"Had you not already achieved a reputation for great cleverness, Mr. Chesterfield, I certainly should take the liberty of bestowing the epithet of dull upon you.

> 'Ay, duller must thou be than the fat weed
> That rots itself in ease on Lethe's wharf,'

if you *really* find no meaning in the style of

reviewing which I have done myself the honour of pointing out to you. But I think not that you are quite so obtuse as you would seem. So we will drop this fanciful discussion on meaning and no meaning, if you please, and come to the plain matter of fact that I want half-a-dozen critical notices *done to order*, that is, in the spirit (as to praise or blame) which is marked against each. In point of reason, and so forth, I will read, if you will give me leave, two that I ran off just before going to bed last night. I give you my honour that I know nothing of either work beyond the name and *colour* of the respective authors. The first is a novel called 'Hope;' the author is a well-known conservative, and one of the most troublesome observers in existence; but as he is accounted a very moral man, I treat him, as you shall see, very gently."

Mr. Marchmont then read as follows:—

"'The reviewer's task would be a very delightful one, did justice and integrity permit the passing over all that is valueless in literature, and marking only such productions as excite our sympathy, amuse our fancy, or elevate our faculties. Nothing could be more delightful than sitting down, as it were, to descant with

the author on things terrestrial and divine, in such a spirit as should enable us to distil precious balm from both. But alas! this may not be. Our duty is imperative, and turning our reluctant eyes from pages redolent of pure philosophy, we are often obliged, as in the present instance, to waste our midnight lamp, while pursuing the irksome and most repugnant task of pointing out the maudlin sophistry of an affected morality, which has only to be received as earnest, in order to quench the glorious light of human freedom for ever.

"'Happily in this case, as in many others, there is an antidote accompanying the poison. The dullness of the 'Hope' which these seemingly endless pages open to us, must weigh heavier on the hapless reader's spirit than despair itself; and we have only to say 'Go! read, and repent the rashness which set you to the task!'" in order to do the fullest justice both to the author, and the public. The work is in three volumes, and neatly printed: but it would be well if this stickler for order (if revengeful Heaven, in punishment of our sins, permit him to perpetrate another book) would for the future divide his chapters somewhat more equally.'

"That is the sort of thing, Chesterfield. There is nothing particularly difficult in it, is there?"

"The principal difficulty, in my opinion," replied Charles, gravely, "consists in finding in one's heart sufficient cruelty and injustice for condemning a work that one has never read. For all you know to the contrary then, this 'Hope' may be one of the ablest works ever written?"

"Oh! for example, now," exclaimed Marchmont, laughing, "I have the most conscientious conviction that every thing written by a conservative must of necessity be as dull as death—so much for my justice. And to prove that my nature is not altogether cruel, I will now read my review of 'William Watkins; or, The Convict Footman.' It is written by one of the most intimate friends I have in the world. And the fine fellow gives capital good feeds too. It would be a devilish pity if his books did not sell. Now listen.

"'We hail these volumes as the advent of a new era in the history of man. If any proof were wanting of the steadily progressive movement towards perfection, which may be traced in all authentic records of the human mind, it might be found in the nicely graduated and regular improvement in all works of imagina-

tion, from the earliest ages to the present day. How, by degrees, have the wild unnatural vagaries of poetry assumed the thrilling interest of reality, and from idly speculating of things unknown, become the faithful chronicler of truth and nature! Homer sang of gods and demigods, of heroes and deeds unknown to earth. Him Virgil followed, and with wing more tame, grew somewhat nearer truth. Then came the monstrous visions of the Tuscan bard, who madly dreamed a hell, and peopled it with human monsters, begot by his own spleen. Fables of chivalry came next, far nearer life, yet still it was life only of the few, not of the million. Of the growing crowd, denser, and denser still, who painted life on stilts, through every successive age, yea, ever coming nearer and nearer to the things that be, it would be bootless to speak, for where are the pages that could hold the list? But through them all, where can we light on one who, bravely trampling down the worn-out boundaries that have hemmed us up within the narrow space assigned to noble deeds, and lofty thoughts, and graceful imagery, has dared to choose his heroes from the common herd? At last, and only now, we have reached this

highest point of human interest. The author of 'The Convict Footman' has come in the fullness of time to teach us of what clay we truly are, and what the pulses which beat the strongest throughout the great majority—sublime in their vast multitude—and forming the majestic living mass, of which kings and heroes make but an atom in the awful whole. This work stands foremost, high, and alone in the van of all the labours of modern intellect. It is needless to say more. The march of mind, that indomitable, ever accelerating movement so gloriously bearing us forward in these latter days, unchecked by any craven fear of whither it may lead, will not fail to convey all men there, where the trumpet of innovation sounds the loudest, and the unshackled soul bounds fiercest forward. We will not add another word, well assured that our awakened countrymen need only to be told that such pages exist, in order to make them start forward in a noble strife, each straining to be first to seize upon them!'

"There, Mr. Chesterfield! The writing an article upon 'The Convict Footman,' is a task I would have yielded to no man, but you perceive that I can praise when I choose it."

"At any rate, Mr. Marchmont, you have read this work," said Charles.

"Devil a line of it, *mon cher*. It is quite enough for me to know who wrote it. Now, then, I think I have given you a lesson in the art of reviewing that you will remember as long as you live. Don't forget the list—take it with you, and let me have the notices as early as you can."

"I do not think I shall ever succeed in this line of composition, Mr. Marchmont," said Charles, preparing to leave the room, "and I would rather not attempt it."

"Hoity toity! my young gentleman! Well, sir, be it as you will—only at this moment I have really no more time to spare, and therefore, very respectfully, I must beg to wish you a good morning."

Chesterfield looked at him for a moment, meditating on the number of pages which he had filled for him during the last four or five months, and felt much inclined to request that he would be pleased to pay him for the same; but shyness, or pride, or a mixture of both, led him to think that he should prefer making the demand by letter; he therefore silently returned his patron's bow, and retired.

As Chesterfield pursued his homeward way, and meditated on the scene which had just past, he felt that he had quarrelled with Marchmont, though no hostile word had passed between them. During the last few weeks, the town being empty, and the necessity of appearing with something like the exterior of a gentleman having vanished with his elegant friends, Mr. Marchmont had indulged himself in a sort of *laissez aller* which had gone far towards disenchanting his young disciple.

It had seemed to Charles, on his first introduction to him, that he filled precisely the situation in society which was the *beau idéal* of his own ambition, and for several months the delusion lasted; for during these months, the Regenerator had still continued to appear before him as the brightest star of the brightest hemisphere he had ever contemplated. But the aspect of things was changed. The rurally-natured young man might see much to admire in the full-dressed arbiter of taste, leaning with easy *nonchalance* on Mrs. Gibson's chimney-piece, or lounging on the sofa of Mrs. Somebody-else, or seated in the post of honour at a gay dinner-table; and, in each case, uttering his *ipse dixits* with the assured confidence of cer-

tain success: nothing could be more natural than that he should gaze, and long to do the like, especially as all this greatness and renown flowed solely from his literary pre-eminence,—a species of distinction to which Charles aspired with sanguine hope, perpetually nurtured by fondly repeating to his heart, "*anch, io son autore!*" But with all this readiness to admire the great master in his butterfly state during the spring and summer, it by no means followed that when he appeared anew in his autumnal grub condition, the same feelings should follow him. The Mr. Marchmont of the drawing and dining rooms of "the intellectual," and the Mr. Marchmont of dirty chop-houses and steamy divans, bore no resemblance whatever to each other; and the heart of Charles Chesterfield reproached him with no inconstancy when he confessed to himself that the editor of *The Regenerator* was by no means the sort of person he had taken him for.

When, therefore, this personage suddenly thought proper to treat the young man in the high and mighty style above described, the young man felt himself in no humour to bear it; and conscious that he had taken no pains to conceal the displeasure and disgust it in-

spired, became perfectly aware, before he reached his lodgings, that the animated page in his existence which recorded his admiring friendship for Marchmont, was turned over, and closed for ever.

The proverb says, that "kissing goes by favour," which, being interpreted, probably means that we caress that for which we have a fancy, and when the fancy turns into another direction, the kissing turns into another direction too. Charles began to feel impatient for the promised invitation from Brighton. He felt sick of London and all that was in it; and though quite determined not to turn his steps homeward till he had published something on his own account, he could not keep his thoughts from travelling in that direction; and they led so often towards Bessy, and the turf seat in the orchard, that when the image of the impassioned Mrs. Sherbourne did happen to obtrude, it brought a sort of shudder with it which, could it have been witnessed by that lady, would have raised the value of a certain imprudent bit of paper in her possession several hundred per cent.

But the invitation from Brighton was still delayed; and, notwithstanding the indispensable

visits to Mount-street, the days and weeks would have seemed almost interminable had it not been for the "Narrative Poem, in monthly numbers," upon which he had began to employ himself. No callings on Mr. Marchmont, either for business or pleasure, broke in upon his leisure, for, though steadfastly determined to apply in a peremptory manner for the money which he considered due to him, he still delayed doing so, from youthful and very natural dislike to a task so perfectly new, and in its nature so extremely prosaic and disagreeable. The hundred pounds lent him by Sir George, were not yet gone; he had, therefore no necessity to prick the sides of his intent, and at length determined not to trouble himself about it till he had received his expected summons from Brighton, at which time he determined to pay all the little bills he owed; and as these, though he knew they could not be much, would certainly require all the ready money he had left, he thought that would be the right time to make his demand.

Meanwhile his poem went on rapidly; three parts out of the proposed twelve were already completed, and so well was he pleased with what he had written, that he began to think it

might be a good plan to show it to a publisher even in this unfinished state. But he had no one with whom he could consult on the subject, and doubts of his own judgment still rendered him timid. Marchmont was out of the question; of him he had neither heard nor seen any thing since the day he declined to undertake the reviewing of works which he had never read. In all literary discussions with his fair friend in Mount-street, it was always her productions, and not his own, which formed their subject-matter, and he had a sort of prophetic conviction that notwithstanding all her ardent affection for him, she would find the perusal of his verses a bore.

"I will ask her, nevertheless," thought he, after once more glancing his eye over the three first cantos. "If they really have the merit I fancy, she must receive pleasure from the perusal; and, perhaps, after all, I do her injustice in doubting it. For though she certainly is a good deal taken up with what she does herself, she can hardly be indifferent to so important an undertaking as this by one whom she loves, alas! but too well, both for his peace and her own. Poor Sylvia! I am too apt, I fear, to judge her harshly!"

Under the influence of such thoughts as these,

Charles hastily rolled up his manuscript and set off for the dwelling of Mrs. Sherbourne. "Oh! it is you, is it?" said the lady, resuming her recumbent position on the sofa, which she had abandoned when she thought the knock might have announced another. "What on earth could have made you knock so queerly, Charles? It was not the least like your countrified rat, tat, tat!"

"Then I hope I improve, Sylvia!" he replied. "But I think I can guess why the knock was different. It may be that it was influenced by the knocking in my bosom, for I am bringing to you what I have hardly courage to show, and yet it is something that I cannot help flattering myself you will like."

"My own Charles! Ah! that is so like you! Tell me then, my best loved friend, what is it that you have brought me?" cried Mrs. Sherbourne, again springing hastily from the sofa.

"Oh dear! How unlucky!" exclaimed Chesterfield, *naivement*. "Then now I am sure you will not like it, because you will be disappointed, Sylvia."

"You know I hate riddles, Mr. Chesterfield; if you have really brought me any thing, do let me see it at once."

"It is not a present, Mrs. Sherbourne," said Charles, gravely. "It is only the three first cantos of a poem which I am writing."

"Well, Chesterfield, I really must say that by way of a lover you are the very least obliging person that I ever encountered. I don't at all mean on account of your not bringing me any of the trifles which you happen to know I want. Of course, you will do as you like, and according to your natural temper and inclination in that respect. But I do think, that your first saying that you had brought me something that I should like, and then confessing that it was nothing but a parcel of rigmarole verses, is rather too bad, and looks exceedingly as if you came with a deliberate determination to plague me."

"Then I had certainly better take myself off again, Sylvia; with such thoughts in your head, you are not likely to make a kind critic."

"Oh! as for that, I am just as likely to be kind now as at any other time. But the truth is I hate verses, and nothing on earth bores me so much as being read to."

"Well then, I will wish you good morning," said Charles, returning the roll of manuscript to

his pocket, and taking his hat. Mrs. Sherbourne looked a little alarmed.

"You are not going to be sulky, Charles, because I don't happen to like listening to verses —are you?" demanded she, in the tone of a gentle but much injured person. "Alas! If you so easily lose your temper, dearest friend, may it not reasonably frighten me for the fate of our future days? But, indeed, indeed, my dearest Charles, it will not do for you to make a practice of reading to me every thing you write. You know, *Caro*, that your most distinguished faculties are facility and copiousness; then imagine, just imagine, what it would be! I too writing so constantly myself! I do hope, to Heaven, Charles, that it is not your intention to read to me eternally all your own compositions?"

"Assuredly not, Mrs. Sherbourne," returned Charles, composedly; "yet I see not how my committing so great a folly, or abstaining from it, can greatly affect the fate, as you call it, of our future days, let my temper under the operation, or the abstaining from it, be what it may."

"I differ from you greatly there," replied

the lady, with a gentle sigh, "for I consider every indication of habits and of temper, as of the very first importance to persons circumstanced as we are. Is not domestic life made up of habits? And is not temper either the sun-beam or the storm that cheers or blasts existence?"

"Temper and habits, Mrs. Sherbourne, are unquestionably of great importance to all human beings; but not more so, I presume, to you and me, than to all the world beside," said Charles.

"I speak not, dear friend, in reference to any peculiarity in our individual natures, but to the relative position in which we stand to each other," she replied.

"Perhaps you are right; I think I understand you now, Mrs. Sherbourne," said he rather eagerly: "and I certainly agree with you in thinking, that when persons who have been fond of each other's society, mutually perceive such discrepancies of thought or feeling as may be likely to render future intercourse painful, they should be ready at once to acknowledge it —whether the discordant symptoms arise from a newly acknowledged contrariety in their habits, or from tempers less equable than either

or both had hoped to find, there can be no question that in both cases, the wisest plan is to keep asunder for the future."

"Ah! petted, and spoiled, as you are, dearest, it must not startle me to hear you talk thus wildly! But no more of this! Go ramble, Charles, in the sweet shades of Kensington. There haply, you will again

'Find your fair soul.'

I would not listen to your enemy, Charles, did he malign you, as you now seem to malign yourself. Go! petted one, go! Nor return to the ark of your rest, till you have found the olive-branch which you have so wantonly thrown away in quitting it."

Charles made no reply, but stood holding his hat suspended between his two hands, turning it round and round, very much with the air of a scolded school-boy, who knew not what to say in excuse for some delinquency of which he had been found guilty.

"How exceedingly like a fool he looks," thought Mrs. Sherbourne; "I shall have no need of his written promise, though I have got it; I shall only have to say, 'We will go to church on Monday, deary,' and on 'Monday to church we shall go.'"

A sort of lambent smile played upon the lips of the fair widow as this thought arose, which degenerated into something very like a sneer, when the young man at last made his bow, and said "Good morning, Mrs. Sherbourne, I shall have the honour of calling on you again to-morrow morning."

"And I shall have the honour of boxing your ears if you do not contrive to be more agreeable to-morrow morning, than you have been this." So saying, she resumed the occupation he had interrupted, and permitted him to leave the room without any further leave-taking.

"I must finish this folly, and at once;" thought Charles, as he stalked down the street with the air of a determined man. "I have been much to blame in suffering it to proceed so far—but though worried to death, I have never felt so heartily sick of her as to-day. Heartless creature! How false must be the caresses of a woman who has not patience to listen to the verses of the man she pretends to love! Oh! Bessy, Bessy! Is it possible that I ever thought her affectation more attractive than thy sweet simplicity? I will see her to-morrow, and, please Heaven, it shall be for the last time."

As to the very explicit declaration which she possessed of his intention to devote his life to

her in the capacity of a husband, he had no more distinct recollection of it than of all the other amatory follies which had passed between them; and the idea of her having any legal claim upon him was quite as foreign from his thoughts as that the Bank of England was about to prosecute him for forgery. He felt, however, that notwithstanding the hollowness of all the professions of love which she had sighed forth into his ears, the falseness of which he considered fully proved by her refusal to listen to his poem, she had still no intention of restoring him to liberty, and he anticipated rather a disagreeable scene on the morrow, but was desperately determined to screw his courage to it. "When it is well over," thought he, "I will write again to Bessy."

The energy of character thus brought into action made him, on reaching his lodgings, decide upon writing without further delay to Mr Marchmont, and he instantly did so in the following words:

"Dear Sir,

"As I expect shortly to be summoned by Sir George Meddows to join his family party at Brighton, I shall be obliged by your immediately settling with me for the various articles

which I have furnished for your magazine. I enclose a list of these, together with the dates at which many of them have been already published, and also copies of the various memoranda which I have preserved of the conversations between us, in which you gave me instructions for the rest. If you will name any hour at which it would be convenient, I will do myself the honour of calling for the purpose of receiving your cheque for the money, and giving you my receipt for the same.

"I remain, dear sir,
"Your faithful servant,
"CHARLES CHESTERFIELD."

To this despatch, he, the next morning, received by the first delivery the following letter;

"Sir,

"I beg to assure you that it will never again be convenient for me to have any thing whatever to do with you. Your gross ignorance, and unmitigated impertinence, as displayed in the last interview with which you favoured me, were quite sufficient to decide me against being troubled with any more such encounters. As to the pecuniary part of your epistle, I must

presume it to have been written in jest. If you can show, however, any written document to which my name is appended, authorizing in the very slightest degree the preposterous claim made in your note, I give you my honour, as a gentleman, to abide by it—though perfectly certain that if any such document exists, it must have been given "in merry sport." Nevertheless, I repeat that if it do exist, I am ready to abide by it, as I always have done by every engagement into which I have entered into from the first moment of my coming into business up to the present hour. I cannot, however, thus take my final leave of you, sir, without giving you a hint that I hope may be useful; but I wish you to understand that I do this rather out of respect to the excellent lady who first presented you to my notice, than from any busy inclination to interfere in your affairs.

"Let me then remark to you, sir, that it is not the custom for the proprietors of any works, like that which I have the honour to conduct, to pay for such contributions as those received from you. Your total inexperience respecting all the principles upon which the modern literature of England is conducted, has, I doubt not, left you ignorant of the fact, that a vast

number of extremely clever writers not only contribute their productions gratis, but are constantly in the habit of paying for the gratifying appearance of their performances in print, either by certain stipulated sums of money paid down, in proportion to the quantity inserted, or else, by the purchase of twenty, fifty, or a hundred copies of the work. I need hardly remind you, sir, that I have never required any thing of the kind from you; a degree of liberality which I flatter myself will be duly appreciated by the estimable lady at whose request I first made acquaintance with you—and now, sir, nothing further remains for me to add, but that I am your very obedient

"Humble servant,
"MARCHMONT."

The state of mind into which young Chesterfield was thrown upon reading this letter was really terrible; and the more so, because, from constitutional gentleness of disposition, his feelings, however irritated, never burst forth, and relieved themselves by any explosion of rage. What he now felt was not so much anger against Mr. Marchmont, as shame and despair for himself.

During the first moments of this bitter agony, he doubted between the torturing belief that all the lofty notions of his own powers, which for years had formed the great happiness of his life, were utterly vain and unfounded, and the conviction that Mr. Marchmont was a literary swindler, and most accomplished villain. Happily for his comfort, his mind did not balance long between the better and the worse hypothesis; and so great was his mental relief, when at length he was cool enough to look back through the whole history of his connexion with this "distinguished man," and to value him with tolerable justness at his worth, that it may be doubted if he had ever felt very much happier since his arrival in London than at the moment when he rationally enough came to the conclusion, that had his productions been nothing worth, Mr. Marchmont would not have taken the trouble to rob him of them.

He now recollected with deep interest and great satisfaction that not all his reiterated efforts had been able to induce Miss Meddows to invite the editor of *The Regenerator* to her drawing-room. "Noble woman!" he exclaimed, with enthusiasm—"What discernment, what dignity, has she displayed! She will not think

the worse of me when she hears that I too despise him, as heartily as she can do herself."

At the age of Charles Chesterfield, strong emotions gènerally excite strong energies. The pertinacious style in which Mrs. Sherbourne had laid claim to him the day before, even at the very moment that she gave proof of the most heartless indifference, had, as we have seen, roused within him a pretty strong inclination to burst asunder the irksome bonds with which she had shackled him, and a lively remnant of the same sort of spirit now determined him to battle stoutly—not against the fraudulent conduct of Mr. Marchmont—(he really and truly despised him vastly too much to think of any thing of the kind)—but against the sea of troubles which seemed to threaten him. There were still two months to elapse before he should be of age. He greatly disliked the idea of applying again to Sir George Meddows for assistance, and still more perhaps that of asking it from his good father. He was conscious of having been a little resolute and headstrong at the time that his London journey was in doubt, and he shrunk from the idea of confessing that it had cost much money, and brought no profit. Rather than

encounter either alternative, he determined to see whether his rhymes could not stand him in some stead with an honester publisher than Mr. Marchmont; and as it still wanted two hours of the earliest time at which the charming Sylvia descended from the retirement of her sleeping apartment, he set off, once more charged with his three cantos, in an opposite direction from Mount-street, in order to employ the interval in making a visit to Mr.——

The palpitation of the heart which seized him on entering the premises of this gentleman, could not be said to arise from the agitation inseparable from a first *début*; for Charles had been an author, and, as he was assured, a very successful author, for months. Yet still, his present proceeding was sufficiently novel, and sufficiently important too, for the result of it to be no light matter. He found breath however to enquire for Mr. ———, and to desire that the card he presented might be delivered to him, with a request for a few moments conversation.

He had waited a much shorter time than he expected, when the door opened, and the present arbiter of his destiny appeared. Nothing could be more courteous and gentlemanlike than the manner in which he was received; and though

something slightly approaching to a smile passed across the countenance of Mr. ——— when Charles mentioned that he had been for some months engaged as contributor to *The Regenerator*, there was nothing in the least discouraging in the manner in which his manuscript was received. On the contrary, there appeared to be an evident intention not to dismiss it unexamined, from the manner in which Mr. ——— said, "You must allow us a day or two, Mr. Chesterfield—and when proper attention has been given to the subject, you shall hear from me."

The vainest and most *exigeant* of young authors could ask no more than this; Charles felt perfectly satisfied, and after wasting an hour, not unpleasantly, in wandering about Hyde Park, and building all sorts of castles, possible and impossible, in the air, he presented himself for what he was determined should be the last time at the door of Mrs. Sherbourne, and being admitted, found that charming little person reading a novel, and sipping bohea.—She looked up, and with an affected start, said,

"Ah! here already, *amico mio?* What a natural creature! Most assuredly you must be something of the lark species—and you carrol,

too, most sweetly—as we all know. Shall I offer you tea?"

"No, not any tea, I thank you, Mrs. Sherbourne. I breakfasted several hours ago."

"Hours? *Cielo!* you positvely make me tremble. But I hope you are not a tyrant Charles? I hope you have no intention of making your poor little wife get up in the middle of the night, like yourself?"

"If I ever have a wife, Mrs. Sherbourne, I shall hope our taste and judgment will accord in this, as in all things else."

"If you ever have a wife! O Charles, what a phrase that is from you to me! Why, dearest, it was but last night that I was singing the old song,

> 'The weary hours are almost past,
> That part my love and me!'

When is it that you are to be of age, my beloved Charles? Believe me, I am incapable of tormenting you by any idle feeling, nor have I the slightest intention of delaying your happiness a single day beyond that on which you attain your majority."

Mrs. Sherbourne's complexion did not undergo the slightest change as she said this,—but poor Charles blushed like a rose-bud. He did

not forget his errand, however, and replied in a voice that betrayed very little agitation—

"Mrs. Sherbourne, I greatly fear that we have mistaken each other."

"As how, Mr. Chesterfield?" she demanded, fixing a steady eye upon him.

"It is possible that you may be only jesting, Mrs. Sherbourne, indeed I hope it is so;—for in truth I should be infinitely concerned did I believe that you had any serious idea of a marriage taking place between us."

"Jesting, sir? jesting on such a subject as this, with the man to whom I have been solemnly affianced for the last three months? What means this frightful language? Are you mad?"

"Not now, Mrs. Sherbourne, whatever I may have been during the earlier days of our acquaintance. But this is a very idle discussion, and to me it is a very disagreeable one. I do not and cannot hold myself affianced to you, Mrs. Sherbourne, for nothing can be further from my thoughts and intentions than to make you my wife. I trust a much happier destiny awaits you than that of becoming the bride of a man who is conscious of having no single point of sympathy with you. Let me at once wish you

good morning—and may all happiness attend you."

"I thank you kindly, sir, for your good wishes. But sit down again, if you please, Mr. Charles Chesterfield; I cannot consent to part with you quite so abruptly. Did you ever hear of such a thing as a written promise of marriage, Mr. Chesterfield?"

Charles turned as pale as death. A vague recollection shot through his brain of having, in answer to a playful and beguiling note of hers, called all the gods to witness that she should be his. Was it possible that this wild rhapsody had been preserved? Could it have been preserved purposely to bring in judgment against him, and destroy, by shameful exposure, and ruinous damages, all his hopes of happiness in life? The bare idea that this was possible, almost turned him to stone.

It was at this moment that Mrs. Sherbourne looked in his face with the last smile she ever bestowed upon him, and, unlike most of her former ones, this last smile was produced without the slightest effort, being the genuine result of feeling herself greatly amused. "O no! You do remember it, then, do you, my *pastor*

fido ?" she said, withdrawing a little bag, which hung at her watch-chain, from the lock of a drawer in her writing-desk to which she was applying it. "Then I will not, at this moment, suffer the precious document to encounter the dangers of exposure.

> 'Twas on a leaf—the wind it blew,
> Away flew the leaf, and promise too !
> Damon's vows I always thought
> Light as the leaf on which he wrote.'

But vows and leaf too, Mr. Chesterfield, may be preserved by a little prudent care, you see; and it was precisely because I suspected the *volage* nature of both, that I have kept them thus carefully enclosed within that cage."

"Yes, I do remember the silly jest," returned Charles, with a boast of inexpressible indignation. "Unworthy woman! Can you thus stand unblushingly before me, and avow the craft by which you would seek to entrap my honour and my peace. But think not that the law can be made the instrument of such a bare-faced plot as this. I fear you not, Mrs. Sherbourne."

"Well, sir, we shall see," she replied, with the most perfect *sang froid*. "I will not, however, permit you to leave me under the influ-

ence of a delusion that may lead you wrong, and eventually, perhaps, plunge you into difficulties, which it may still be in your power to avoid. I have already shown the letter containing your promise of marriage to a very able lawyer, who assures me that it is quite impossible for any jury to doubt about it for a single instant. You had therefore better think calmly on the business, Mr. Chesterfield, before you drive me into court. I love you passionately; of that I am sure you cannot doubt: and it is because the unsophisticated sincerity of my nature has led me to permit others also to be aware of this my passionate attachment to you, that I feel compelled to enforce justice, if your own heart refuses to accord it. It is quite impossible that I should permit myself to be pointed at, as the forsaken victim of a false-hearted country bumkin! Think better of it, Mr. Charles Chesterfield. Let our wedding day follow that on which you come of age, and depend upon it you will find yourself one of the happiest creatures in existence."

"As your husband, madam!" retorted the outraged young man with bitterness. "But it is idle to bandy words thus. I must take my

chance, and trust to the honesty and good sense of an English jury for protection."

"This then is your ultimatum, Mr. Chesterfield?"

"I mean it to be so, Mrs. Sherbourne; I trust that I now speak to you for the last time."

"Our personal intercourse may very likely not be frequent for the future. But you will hear of me through my lawyer, Mr. Chesterfield. And now, sir, you may go—and I wish you an extremely good morning."

Charles turned his head away that he might not see the detestable expression of her mocking countenance, and without proffering another word, walked out of the house.

CHAPTER II.

The Miseries of the Hero reach their Climax—He escapes from London, and carries his sorrows to Brighton.

The remarkably sudden recovery of Sir George Meddows, in consequence of changing the air from London to Brighton, did not seem to give his daughter quite so much pleasure as might have been expected. As he regained his health and spirits, she seemed to lose hers; and amidst the incessant gaiety into which her aunt and her father contrived to plunge, she resolutely kept herself apart, entering very little into company, and using her utmost influence to prevent their continuing the expensive habits of their London establishment.

Had not this sudden recovery of her father's

health from his as strangely sudden illness been accompanied by the highest possible flow of spirits, Clara would decidedly have renewed her project of offering her little fortune in order to enable him to meet the claims of his ward; but though, unhappily, no doubt whatever rested on her mind respecting the fictitious nature of his malady, and very little as to the occasion which gave rise to it; she could not but believe that from some source or other he was now certain of finding the means of exonerating himself from the embarrassment which had so pressed upon him; and this being the case, she wisely determined to let things take their course, and reserve the sacrifice she was quite ready to make, till some new pressure arose, when it might be the means perhaps of bribing her unworthy parent into leaving England, and abandoning the ruinous course of life which she but too truly guessed he was leading.

Of Dalrymple, and the sudden termination of all intercourse between them, she strove to think as little as possible; but that little was enough to dim the lustre of her eye, and reduce the lovely contour of her perfect form to a degree of thinness that it was a pain to see. Though uniformly believing that he had never entertained

for her any sentiment approaching to love, she could not but remember that the intercourse between them had at least amounted to an intimacy exceeding that of mere ordinary acquaintance, and that the sudden termination of it could not be merely accidental. That it was herself who had occasioned it—that it was a torturing paroxysm of jealousy which had thus driven him forth from a large circle of friends and acquaintance to the uplands and groves of his country residence, at a season when there were few living things besides flocks and herds to bear him company, never for an instant entered her thoughts. As little did she imagine that by most unjust and unreasonable inference, she was suspected of being worldly-minded, because she had the misfortune of being surrounded by those who were so, and that her mind was deemed less pure and less noble than it appeared to be, because she had passed some years of her life out of England. That it would have been better for her to know all this, cannot be doubted, as, in the first place, the injustice of it might have done something towards lowering the estimate she had formed, reaching very nearly to perfection, of one who judged her so harshly; and, in the second, she would no longer

have pined under the sharp torment of believing that she was devoid of all attraction in the only eyes which she had ever desired should look upon her with favour. If it were her destiny ever to benefit either by the one or the other of these healing blessings, it was not to be during her residence at Brighton, for month after month of this weary interval wore away without the occurrence of a single circumstance likely to restore her peace of mind.

The manner of Mrs. Longuéville towards her was indeed somewhat changed for the better. Hitherto there had always seemed to be a sort of secret committee for ever sitting on all her acts and deeds, of which her father and aunt were the only members, but before whom evidence was continually brought by Josephine, Mrs. Longuéville's French maid, which produced perpetual annoyance to poor Clara. Every thing she wore, and every thing she did not wear; every thing she bought, and every thing she did not buy; all the persons she liked, and all the persons she did not like; and, in a word, every thing she did, and every thing she did not do, successively became cause of complaint, reproof, and restraint. But all this was greatly altered. It seemed as if Mrs. Longuéville's

present tactics would have led her rather to hold committee with the daughter than the father; and had Clara so willed, she might have listened to a vast deal of "*triste raison*" on the subject of Sir George's thoughtless extravagance. But many feelings led her to check this love of conversation; clearly as she saw, and deeply as she deplored the contemptible character of her father, she had never breathed a thought on the subject, save to her own aching heart; and had she been compelled to do so, her aunt would have been the very last confidant she would have chosen. Not only did she believe her to have been the abetter of all his extravagance, and the direct cause of much of it; but she suspected that the frightful love of being unprincipled, upon principle—the witnessing of which had, throughout her short, sad life, constituted her chiefest sorrow—took its source in the calculating mind of her aunt, rather than in the hare'm-scare'm brain of her father. It was not, therefore, very likely that she should listen with much cordiality to the hints she now constantly received of Mrs. Longuéville's exclusive attachment to herself—of her opinion that it would be better for all parties, if she and her niece were to put their incomes together, and return to

Paris; one of the frequent insinuations against Sir George's honesty and honour, in all matters which concerned his pecuniary affairs.

In the midst of all these harassing feelings, Clara had well nigh forgotten the existence of Charles Chesterfield altogether; when one morning her father gaily tossed an open letter before her, saying, "Read that Clara, and tell me if you can show cause why the petition therein contained should not be granted?"

The young lady laid down her work, took up the letter, and read the following epistle from her forgotten friend:—

"My dear Sir,

"Your great kindness to me, which I trust that I have done nothing to forfeit, induces me to take a very great liberty. When you left London, you were so good as to say that you should wish me to pay you a visit at Brighton; and moreover, that you did *not* wish me to return home without consulting you. To this last injunction I have most strictly adhered, though of late I have wanted the counsel of kind friends on more occasions than one. At the present moment, in particular, I should be very glad to have the advantage of your advice

on a circumstance that has occurred to me, of so unexpected a nature, that I feel totally at a loss how to act. May I then, Sir George, take the liberty of immediately leaving London for Brighton?

"I remain,

"Your obedient, and grateful servant,

"Charles Chesterfield."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Clara, "I am afraid he has got into some scrape or other. Pray write very kindly to him, Papa. I shall be very glad to see him."

"And so shall I too, Clara," said the baronet. "I had by no means forgotten him, I assure you. But as I have made up my mind not to leave this delightful place till after Christmas, I postponed the invitation which I promised him, in order that he might spend the beef-and-pudding season with us. I don't mean to put him into separate lodgings here, Clara; it was absolutely necessary in London, you know, but you shall see that I intend to pet him famously now. He is a monstrous good fellow. I will write to him instantly, and in a style that shall make him come down as gay as a lark."

The answer written by Sir George to his

favoured *protégé* was, in effect, the most affectionate and obliging possible; assuring him that the only reason for his not having written before, was his persuasion that it would be best to let him choose his own time for leaving London, concluding with a most kind message from Clara, and a cordial recommendation to him to lose no more time, but to make his appearance among them as speedily as possible.

In a postscript, Sir George commissioned his young friend to bring down with him a dozen pair of white riding-gloves; ditto, ditto, for evening wear; a couple of black satin cravats; a pint bottle of *esprit de rose;* a box of the finest cigars, and a set of the best possible razors; adding, that if there was any difficulty about finding ready money to pay for these trifles, his best way would be to take the letter to Howel and James's, where he would find no difficulty in getting all these articles, or any thing else in the world that he might happen to want. "I am not quite sure," he added, "that they keep cigars, but they will be able to put you in the way of getting them."

Chesterfield found this letter, together with another brought by the *petite poste,* lying on his table, on returning from one of his long solitary

rambles in Kensington Gardens. He had more than once resolutely determined that *nothing* should prevent his completing his poem, and that not even the anxiety he felt for Mr. ——'s opinion of the portion of it placed in his hands, should induce him to suspend his pen; but alas! the young poet found his genius less obedient to his will than he had expected. It was in vain that he sat down before his desk; the docile paper, and the ready ink, seemed mocking him with their obedient willingness to come together, for he had no energy to wield the pen that was to unite them. His hero, his heroine, and all the subsidiary groups that had began so gracefully to weave themselves into the harmonious maze of his fable, now rose before him like the dim ghosts of his late bright imaginings, seeming to stand all pale and passionless, and as if unable to pronounce a single word beyond the awful adjuration—

"Leave us—leave us to repose!"

While the only faculty of his mind retaining power to act was that of conjecture, which ceased not to bring before him, in most feverish profusion, every possible and impossible answer from Mr. ——, who throughout all these

nervous nights and days haunted his mind's eye as the incarnation of his destiny. While in this miserable state, his greatest relief was to walk for hours together in the forsaken shades of Kensington; and what would have become of him had London been full, and the Gardens in fashion, it is impossible to say. So completely had these literary hopes and fears taken possession of his mind, that Mrs. Sherbourne herself, as well as her threatened prosecution, completely went out of his head for hours together, and had she not addressed the following concise note to him, it is probable that ere long he would not have thought of it for more than a minute at a time. But these lines aroused him; and it was upon the receipt of them that he despatched the letter given above to Sir George Meddows.

"Charles Chesterfield!

"Think well what you are about before you drive a fond and faithful woman to despair. I adore you, Charles, as fondly as ever! Much too fondly, alas! to remember the cruelty of your conduct at our last dreadful meeting, one moment after you give me reason to believe that you wish me to forget it. But though I still

thus frankly avow the tenderness of my feelings I owe it to myself to tell you that this tenderness will never make me abject; and that, if I hear not from you as a lover, you will hear from my attorney of your broken vows.

"I live as thou usest me,

"SYLVIA SHERBOURNE."

The first glance showed Charles, that of the two letters which awaited him, one was from Sir George Meddows, and the other from an unknown correspondent. It was this he seized upon, for he knew that, in all probability, it contained the judgment passed on his manuscript by one whose word in such matters was very nearly fate. But though he held it in his hand he could not open it, though for the last five days every hour had appeared like two, because he so eagerly longed for it; now that it was within his grasp, and that no obstacle sterner than a bit of wax kept him from the only information in all the world which was worth having, he had not courage to meet it. But this breathless, trembling, hot, and cold condition, was not one which could long be endured; in a sudden paroxysm of bold impatience the cover was torn asunder, and thrown

aside, and Mr. ———'s note in legible characters remained in his hand wide open, and staring him in the face.

"Now then!" said Charles desperately; and without further delay, read as follows:—

"Sir,

"The verses which you have been so obliging as to submit to our perusal have great merit, and show a very happy invention, and much facility. But I am sorry to say, that in the present state of the trade it will not be in our power to undertake the speculation of publishing them.

"I remain, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"———.

"P.S.—The MS. is left with a clerk, and will be delivered to your order."

No heroine ever more literally sank into her chair, than did Charles Chesterfield after perusing these lines. Poor fellow! The pang was indeed a keen one. For about ten minutes he sat perfectly immoveable, and firmly believed himself to be the most unhappy man in exist-

ence. During this short but terrible interval, the threats of Mrs. Sherbourne, which had hitherto given him very little concern, made him actually shudder, and striking his forehead with his clenched fist, he exclaimed rather theatrically, though with much genuine suffering—

> "When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
> But in battalions!"————

The concussion, however, did him good, and so far brought him to himself, as to enable him to seize, open, and read the letter of Sir George Meddows. There was comfort in it. Not indeed that it could heal the wound he had just received, but at least it diverted in some degree the gloomy current of his thoughts. The notion of movement, of a journey, of the sea, which he had never yet beheld, was welcome as a fresh breeze to a feverish brow; and within an hour he was so far recovered as to have made the use of Sir George's letter, which the postscript recommended; and this being done with perfect success, the various articles were packed up, and his place taken before he slept for the morrow.

By ten o'clock the following morning, he was on the top of a coach that was gaily galloping

towards Brighton; and though he looked pale, melancholy, and careworn, he was not wholly insensible to the pleasure of moving rapidly through the bright clear air of an October morning, with London in the rear, and Brighton in the van.

CHAPTER III.

Charles receives many assurances of Friendship, and contrives to settle some important Business without losing any time about it.

If a kind reception from the friends he went to visit could have cured the sorrows he brought with him, Charles Chesterfield would have forgotten all his misfortunes at Brighton. Mrs. Longuéville received him as she had never received him before, for he had been in the room with her for at least ten minutes before it became evident that she had forgotten his presence. Clara was really and truly glad to see him, and testified more interest in her inquiries after his welfare, upon remarking his worried look and clouded eye, than she might have done had he worn the same hopeful and almost triumphant

aspect that she had left him with. But all this was nothing in comparison to the warm affection displayed by Sir George. He really could scarcely have appeared more delighted had an only son returned to him after long absence, and he so frequently called the heavens to witness that he was devilish glad to see him, that a temper much less disposed to have faith in professions than that of Charles, might have been tempted to believe him.

All this was, of course, very soothing and agreeable, and the more so as it rendered easy the task of confession, which he was well aware he must fully perform before he could profit by their advice. Sir George was so inexpressibly amused by the narrative of his adventure with Mrs. Sherbourne, that it was some time before the vehemence of his mirth left him power to speak, and when it did, his first words were not very encouraging. "The woman is an atrocious animal, Charles, there is no doubt upon that point: and as to marrying her, it would be a considerably worse speculation than hanging yourself. But after all, such a business as this is no joke, I promise you. She may easily get half your fortune from you by way of damages, and I am terribly afraid that it will

be no easy matter to get out of it. But stay! Egad Charles, I've thought of a way that will do her completely, and neatly, and featly! Hurrah! I have it, I have it!"

Greatly comforted, but exceedingly anxious nevertheless to learn the means by which his kind friend hoped to release him from the threatened danger, he replied—

"Thank Heaven, Sir George, that you see hope for me! The half of all I depend upon for subsistence would be bad enough, but I should hold it as nothing in comparison to the disgrace which would for ever attach to my name were I to become the defendant in such a cause as this. Tell me, dear Sir George, I entreat you to tell me, how you think I may get out of it?"

Sir George Meddows very properly replied to the former part of this speech before he answered the latter. "You are only too right, my dear fellow," said he; "it is certainly no subject for joking, and I feel heartily ashamed of having for a moment been beguiled into laughing at it. To a fine, promising, talented fellow like you, the loss of a few thousands is nothing, positively nothing by way of a misfortune, and I'll lay my life that it would only act as a spur to drive you

further and faster on your road to fortune. But the indelible disgrace of having such a story as this tacked to your name for ever, must be guarded against at any risk. A man is never ruined, Charles, till he has lost his good name, and that must be preserved to you, *coûte que coûte.*"

"But speak, dear sir! Tell me, I entreat you, in what way you think I may escape from this dreadful danger?"

"Be satisfied, Charles, when I tell you that I will take the management of this very awkward business entirely upon myself. Some way or other I must get you through it, my poor fellow; but the notion that came into my head just now is not altogether unobjectionable. It might possibly involve my own name in a way I should not like, and therefore I had rather think about it, and see if any thing else can be done before I name it to you. But set your mind at ease, my dear boy; I pledge you my honour that I will not forsake you in this strait, and will get you through it too, somehow or other, whether I involve myself by doing so or not."

Charles seized the hand of his generous benefactor with the most enthusiastic gratitude, and truly declared that he knew no words strong

enough to express the feelings such kindness inspired. Altogether the scene became really touching, for Sir George himself, though rarely manifesting any kind of emotion, except gaiety, seemed moved; and as he wrung the hand of Charles in return for his fervent pressure, he turned away his head, as if in some degree overcome by it.

This conversation was, in truth, a great relief to the embarrassed young man; for so heartily did he feel ashamed of the folly which had put him in the power of Mrs. Sherbourne, that he had more than once, since the receipt of her last letter, thought it would be better to marry her than let his name reach his native village through the jocose report of a newspaper, upon such a trial as that with which she threatened him. Alas! How far unlike was this to the fame which he had hoped would precede his return!

His mind lightened of this pressing burden, he proceeded to recount his adventure with Mr. Marchmont, and the hostile termination of their intercourse; and here again Sir George showed himself to be a very cordial friend, by the warm indignation he expressed at what he very justly called the Regenerator's rascally conduct. "But here Charles," he added, with a very discourag-

ing shake of the head, "I fear I cannot help you. Mr. Marchmont would not care a straw for any thing either you or I could say of him. He is armed both with dagger and shield; and the best advice I can give you is, to let him alone, and take good care to keep out of the way of such dirty doings in future."

To Sir George, notwithstanding all this great kindness, Charles said not a word of what was after all perhaps the bitterest of his misfortunes, namely, his terrible disappointment about his poem. He dreaded lest the gay baronet might laugh at this too, and shrunk from the agony he should feel under such an infliction with a degree of cowardice which he had never felt on any occasion before. But of Clara he felt no such fear, and to her he resolved to confess this deepest of all his sorrows. She listened to him as he expected she would do. Her speaking features expressed concern, sympathy, and, what was certainly as welcome as either, surprise.

"There is but one way of consoling yourself, Mr. Chesterfield, for this painful disappointment," she said. "It will reconcile you to your natural home; and when you shall come, after all these misadventures, to compare the feverish

hopes of London with the joys of a country life, which never fails to keep every promise of pleasure that it makes us, will you not at last confess that it is the best and safest? For when do spring or autumn cheat us of their promised flowers and fruits?—or the summer hide its glorious face from us?—or even winter fail to bring its crispy brightness, and its cosey comfort?—When you shall come again to compare all this with what you have lost since you looked elsewhere for enjoyment, will you not feel that Charlton is a safer and a happier place than London?"

"Ah, Miss Meddows!" replied Charles, colouring, "I am sure that such were your thoughts about me from the very first."

"Yes, Mr. Chesterfield. I thought your situation at Maplebury appeared to be a singularly happy one, and I own I thought you were running great risk of changing the better for the worser part; were you to take my advice now, it would not be long ere your good mother held you in her arms again. You have been quite long enough from home to enjoy the return to it, and have seen quite enough of London and its ways to furnish materials for many a winter night's pleasant talk in the country.

There is no occasion whatever that you should cease to exercise your talent for writing, which, as you are happily independent, may be indulged blamelessly, and perhaps, in the end, profitably. Come, Mr. Chesterfield, take my advice. Let your family have the great pleasure of seeing you in the midst of them the day that you come of age. You may do this, and yet have time enough to see all that this part of the country has to show. What say you to it?"

"That there is nothing in the whole world which I should like so well!" exclaimed Charles in a tone that showed for the moment, at least, a perfect oblivion of all his sorrows. "But—but—there is a great deal of business which I must do before I can leave London for good—and some of it cannot be done till after I am of age," he added.

Could Mr. Dalrymple have witnessed the change of colour which this avowal produced on the cheek of Clara, it is probable that he would have interpreted it as the proof of a much deeper interest in the young man's concerns than it was at all seemly for Miss Meddows to feel—and most other people might have been of the same opinion; for who could have guessed the vague, yet defined, the really unknown, yet

strangely assured evil, which she prognosticated from young Chesterfield's coming into possession of his little fortune, while still under the influence of her father? She meditated for a moment, uncertain whether she ought to—whether she could, say more. At length, she replied, "I have certainly no right, Mr. Chesterfield, to question or admonish you; but you have spoken to me so candidly about your literary affairs that I will venture to take the same tone, and say that I trust you have no concerns of any importance with which your excellent father is unacquainted. Trust me, he is your best and safest counsellor; and I will venture to predict that if you rob him, from any motive whatever, of the confidence which is so justly his due, you will never, while you live, cease to repent it."

"I hope and trust, my dear Miss Clara," said Charles, deeply touched, and most truly grateful for the interest which her earnest manner expressed, "that I shall soon again be under the shelter of my father's roof, and of my father's wisdom. Your kindness has done me great good now, as it always has done from the first hour that I was thrown into your way. You have almost removed the bitterness of my

disappointment about my poem, by showing that you did not care the less about me for it—and that makes me hope that they won't despise me for it at home, either. Perhaps," he added, with something of solemnity that touched his friend Clara deeply, "Perhaps, I have great reason to be thankful for it. I fear that I have been very near falling into a pit of death and darkness, which was made attractive to me by the silly belief that Fame lay at the bottom of it. Had Marchmont been an honest man, he might have ended by leaving me with as little religion as he has got himself."

"If you never lose your religion, Mr. Chesterfield, till an honest man seeks to take it from you, I have a great notion that you have a good chance of keeping it as long as you live," answered Clara. "And now," she added, laughing, "I will release you without preaching any more for the present. You will find delightful rambling upon the downs, and I will bid you good-bye till dinner-time."

Seldom has a poor lad at a distance from all his kith and kind felt himself more in want of their healing love than did our unfortunate Charles when he left London for Brighton; and still seldomer has such a one met from persons,

so little near to him in any way, such efficient consolation as he had found. Sir George's knowing nods, gay winkings, and confident assurances that he would steer him as clear of that dangerous little quicksand, the Sherbourne, as if he had never driven within sight of her, set him perfectly, though still ignorantly, at ease on that score; while Mrs. Longuéville's increased civility proved that he had lost nothing in the eyes of the finest lady of his acquaintance, by having quarrelled with the celebrated Mr. Marchmont; and Clara's greatly augmented kindness of manner, her air of more familiar intimacy, and the frank sincerity with which she entered into all his concerns, proved beyond the possibility of a doubt that the check which his literary hopes had received had in no degree lessened him in her eyes.

Days—nay, weeks,—flew rapidly. Charles was in nobody's way, for when not inlisted into some scheme of amusement by his friends, he wandered for hours over the beautiful heights which showed him for the first time in his life all the different aspects which the broad sea, for ever varying, yet for ever the same, could wear. But if, instead of this convenient independence of occupation, he had been the most troublesome

hanger-on that an unfortunate invitation ever hitched upon a family, it would have made no difference in the length of his visit; for Sir George Meddows's affection for him was still very evidently on the increase, and he seldom suffered a day to pass without repeating that he was quite determined not to part with Charles till after Christmas.

After some discussion, it had been settled between the brother and sister that as Brighton was in all ways so exceedingly agreeable, it would be "wisest, discreetest, best," to let their house in Bruton-street. To this arrangement Clara most joyfully acceded, and was made more happy by this new approach to prudence and economy than she believed any thing could now make her.

But before this arrangement could take place, it was necessary that some part of the family should go to town in order to see that the house and all that was in it was left fit for the reception of a tenant. Sir George declared that nothing should induce him to leave the sea for a single day, as the doing so might bring back the complaint which its vicinity had so wonderfully cured; and he declared, also, that dear

Charles Chesterfield should stay with him as he could not be left entirely alone.

Happy as Charles had been at Brighton, he certainly would greatly have preferred leaving it for London at this time. A few days only remained of his minority, and his punctual father had already transmitted to him all instructions as to how he might immediately avail himself of its termination, for the purpose of paying Sir George, as well as some other debts, all trifling however, but which he could not have discharged before he left town without stripping himself of his last shilling. He was eager, therefore, to show his vouchers at the bank, and relieve himself from the responsibilities which appeared to him almost disgraceful. But he felt far too grateful for all the kindness he had received not to yield to Sir George's wish, and merely saying that his principal business in London would be to obtain the money necessary for liquidating the debt he owed him, he agreed to postpone it till the ladies should return. Any attempt on the part of Clara to interfere with this arrangement was impossible; and the two ladies set off for London attended only by servants.

Sir George was still an excellent walker, and as it happened that the day on which Mrs. Longuéville and her niece started on this expedition was a remarkably fine one, he proposed to his young companion, as soon as their carriage had driven off, that they should take a long ramble upon the downs. Charles readily agreed, and they set off, arm-in-arm, in a very friendly and familiar manner.

As soon as they had fairly quitted the town, and its suburbs, Sir George, gaily addressing his companion, said "My dear Charles, you have never yet heard what my scheme is for freeing you from the clutches of Mrs. Sherbourne. Have you no curiosity about it?—no longing desire to know what I mean to do?"

"Not much, Sir George," replied the young man; "I am so ignorant myself, and so full of faith in you, that I have permitted my mind to turn away as much as possible from all thoughts on the subject. But I shall be very glad to listen to you, if you have any information to communicate on the subject. Do you not think, however, from my having heard nothing more of her, that she may have changed her mind upon the subject?"

"And come to the magnanimous resolution of

letting you rest in peace?" said Sir George. "No, upon my word, Charles, I do not think any such thing. The weeks that have passed since her sublime resolution was taken, have not been more, nor so much, I should think, as would be necessary to put the business *en train* —not to mention, moreover, that it is exceedingly probable they don't know where to find you. How should they—you did not leave your address with her, I suppose?"

"Most certainly I did not."

"Then lay not the flattering unction to your soul that you will hear no more of her. Trust me, the next *billet-doux* you will receive will be through the hands of her lawyer."

Charles answered only with a deep sigh, which seemed to acknowledge the truth of the prediction, and all the horror of it.

"Nay, sigh not so," said Sir George, laughing; "faint heart, they say, never won fair lady, nor got rid of one either, Charles; you must remember that, if you please. And now let me speak to you very seriously of a matter of business, not so wholly unconnected with this of Mrs. Sherbourne as you may think at first sight. It is one, too, my dear Charles, which I do assure you without the slightest

mixture of flattery, or making a boast of the real affection which I feel for you, has very frequently employed my thoughts since you left your good father's house with me. I speak of the employment, or investment as it is technically called, of your little fortune, Charles. I know no man living who better understands the management of the particular class of affairs in which he is engaged than your excellent father; but his manner of life has put all questions concerning the profitable investment of money quite out of his reach, and it is for that reason that I feel myself called upon, imperatively, I may say, to step forward with my knowledge and experience upon a subject which certainly, beyond all others, requires both. Are you disposed to listen to me, my dear young friend, and for the present to turn your thoughts altogether from Mrs. Sherbourne ?"

Charles assured him that he should listen with grateful attention to every thing he said on the subject.

"Well then," was the kind reply, "I will speak to you as I would to my own son, if I were blessed with one. Are you aware, Charles, how very low the rate of government interest has fallen ?"

"I think my father told me, Sir George, but upon my word, I forget all about it," replied the young man, ingenuously.

"So it ever is with men of genius, I believe. Speculators upon Providence do not pay half the attention that they ought to do to the admirable equality that exists between man and man. You write verses with the facility of Pope, and at the very moment of coming into possession of the money, upon the interest of which you are to exist, you actually do not know what that interest is; whilst I, who could hardly write a stanza if my life depended upon it, understand with the nicest accuracy the varying value of every species of property, with its real worth and annual returns, as thoroughly as a shepherd knows his flock, or a gardener his seedlings. Nor is the case peculiar to us, Charles. You will find, as you get on, the same chequered pattern of intellect over the whole world. It is, therefore, that men find it necessary to help each other—and by doing this, the talents of each turn to the advantage of all."

Charles was delighted. He had never heard Sir George descant in so philosophical a strain before; and he felt all the advantage of having for a friend and guide a man whose general

views were as enlarged, as his practical and special knowledge was acute. "He will get me out of this Sherbourne noose," thought he, "if mortal man can do it."

"Your income, my dear fellow," resumed the baronet, "if your property remains in the funds, will be somewhat less than a hundred and fifty pounds a year. On this sum, I will venture to say, from what I already know of your gentlemanly habits and feelings, you will find it quite impossible to live. You know what you have already spent since you came to town, Charles, and you know too, that you have not altogether lived at your own expense. Guess, therefore, how things would go with you, if you attempted to live independently upon a hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"It would be impossible, Sir George," replied the young man, while a pang shot through his heart, as he remembered with what confidence he had made his calculations for the future, under the persuasion that the principal part of his income would proceed from his literary labours. But after the pause of a moment, he added, with tolerable composure, "I am in no danger, however, of falling into difficulties on that account. I shall hope in a year or two to

get into orders, and in the interval my father will be both able and willing to help me."

This was not exactly such an answer as Sir George would have desired; but, nevertheless, it rather stimulated than checked his eloquence, and he therefore proceeded with great animation.

"How I love you, Charles," he exclaimed, "for that gentle and beautiful spirit of contentment which prepares you, as it were, for every possible contingency. But this rather increases than lessens the desire I feel to see you absolutely and *bonâ-fide* independent. Independent of the world and all its caprices, independent of Mr. Marchmont, independent even of your own excellent father. And most truly do I rejoice to say that it is in my power to put you in the way of becoming so. I have, as you probably know, very large estates in Ireland."

Sir George paused; but Charles never happened to have heard any thing about his large estates in Ireland, and he therefore replied by a gentle shake of the head, which very distinctly said "*No;*" but which implied no shadow of doubt as to the fact.

"Yes," resumed Sir George, "the estate is in truth only too large, and, notwithstanding its noble rent-roll, is perpetually encumbered by

enormous expenses in the way of—of—repairing farm-houses, draining bogs, building bridges, making roads, and a hundred other things, too tedious to mention, all more or less inevitable upon widely spreading property of this kind. Now, of course, this enables—I may say, indeed, that it obliges me to raise trifling sums of money from time to time upon this fine property. Your excellent father, as perhaps you know, Charles, has already had the advantage of vesting a thousand pounds in this very advantageous manner. I had great pleasure in offering it to him, but not so much, I freely confess, as I feel now in proposing the same thing to you ; for somehow or other you have contrived to take a singularly strong hold upon my affections. Your four thousand pounds, Charles, secured by a mortgage upon my estate, will bring you in exactly three times the income yielded by the funds; and though this, my dear boy, is by no means equal to the fortune I shall hope eventually to see you enjoy, it would at any rate be a maintenance. What say you to this, dear Charles? Are you willing to trust me with your money upon my personal security?"

These last words were uttered with a pleasant

smile, which smile Charles affectionately returned, as he said—

"Trust you, Sir George?"

The extremity of the rustic ignorance in which poor Charles Chesterfield had been reared will be properly estimated, when it is stated that the ill-matched ideas of dishonesty and high station had never at any instant of his existence entered his head together. The noonday sun and total darkness would hardly have seemed more incongruous, had he heard them named together; and Sir George's little obliviousness about shillings and sixpences was so far from having even awakened suspicion within him, that it had only made him feel more respectfully aware of the great difference in their situations, inasmuch as what to him was quite inconvenient to lose, was too trifling for his wealthy patron even to remember.

This merry question therefore, "Are you willing to trust me with your money?" very naturally produced a smiling rejoinder, because, of course, he could only take it jocosely; but when, after patting him good-humouredly on the shoulder, and nodding his head, as much as to say, "We understand each other,"—when after

this little eloquent dumb show, Sir George resumed the conversation in a graver and more business-like tone, Charles answered with equal gravity, and assured Sir George that he himself and all his family would be most deeply grateful if he would have the great kindness to undertake the management of his money, and the placing it in whatever way he thought most advantageous.

"I believe it, my dear boy," replied the baronet, wringing his hand with much affection. "And this business once settled, I will explain my plan about Mrs. Sherbourne."

No one could be more lively or agreeable than was Sir George after the conversation had reached this point; but he soon confessed that he felt himself some few years older than he had been, and therefore proposed that they should turn their steps homewards, which brought them back in time for Sir George to despatch a letter or two by the post; one of which was to desire his man of business immediately to send down a power of attorney for Charles to execute, which, as he observed to Chesterfield, would enable them to complete the business without having the bore and the expense of a journey to

London, just when Brighton was so particularly agreeable.

This sort of business indeed, when proper agents are set to manage it, is easily and promptly executed; and several days before Mrs. Longuéville and Clara returned from London, Sir George Meddows was in possession of Charles Chesterfield's legacy, and Charles Chesterfield was in possession of Sir George Meddows's note of hand for the amount.

CHAPTER IV.

Schemes—The Plotters disagree—Much Business is afoot—A sudden Journey—A *tête-à-tête* between the Father and Daughter.

As soon as this little affair was completely settled, Charles once more led the after-dinner conversation between himself and his patron to the subject of his threatened difficulties with Mrs. Sherbourne.

"All our money business is settled now, Sir George," said he, "is it not?"

"Yes Charles, quite settled; every thing is now perfectly straight between us."

"Well then, my dear sir, will you forgive my plaguing you once more about Mrs. Sherbourne? You said that you had thought of some plan to get me out of her power."

"And so I have, Charles; do not fancy that I have forgotten it: but no man who thoroughly understands business, none at least with such regular habits as myself, ever will mix two things together, if it be in any way possible to keep them separate. It is for this reason, and for this reason only, that I have suffered this subject to drop. You refer to it, my dear fellow, exactly at the proper time, not only because one thing being finished another may be taken in hand; but because the completion of the one enables you very advantageously to set about the other. But tell me, Charles, do you think you can stand the shock of being told that in my opinion Mrs. Sherbourne's tender attachment to you originated in her knowledge of the fact that you had a sum of ready money in your possession?"

"My vanity *has* made a great fool of me, Sir George, as I am quite ready to confess; but as far as Mrs. Sherbourne is concerned that weakness is quite over, and did I think it at all possible that she could have known of this before I myself named it to her, I should be quite ready to believe that from the very first her attention to me had no other object."

"Have no further doubts then on the subject.

I will undertake to assure you that she did know it,—and further, Charles, I will undertake to assure you also, that this threatened action is only brought forward because she knows you have those few thousands wherewith to pay the hoped-for damages. This being the case, you have only to let her understand that you have made away with your money in order to make her instantly suspend the proceedings."

"But if I tell her that I have let you have the money, Sir George, she will know that it is only ten times safer than ever it was. That will not stop her," said Charles innocently.

Sir George for a moment employed himself very intently in peeling a dry walnut, but presently answered, "That is perfectly true, certainly, and therefore care must be taken that the transaction between us is placed in such a light as to make her feel that you have no longer the command of the money. To say the truth, I believe it was this notion which first led me to think of your placing it in my hands, and I particularly wish that you should let your excellent father understand that such was my motive."

"My father, Sir George?" replied Charles

with a look of dismay; "I would not for the whole world that my father or any of my friends at Charlton should ever know any thing about Mrs. Sherbourne, or the foolish scrape I have got into with her. Indeed, Sir George, you must excuse my saying any thing to my father about it."

Sir George's countenance had less of good-humour in it at that moment than young Chesterfield had ever seen it wear before. "I should be sorry to vex you, Charles, in any way," he replied; "but I'll tell you fairly that I shall consider myself as exceedingly ill-used if your father is not made to understand the reason for which I have so hurried through this business. With me every thing, it is true, is done promptly—such is my habit, as it is in fact of all real men of business; but in this case I should certainly not have permitted you to place this money in my hands without consulting your dear good father on the subject, had it not been for the sake of having it at once in our power to stop this nefarious claim upon you. He must know it, Charles, he must indeed; unless, by the bye, you should prefer not mentioning the transaction to him at all; in that case, of course, I shall have nothing more to say."

"I should prefer any thing, Sir George,"

replied Charles, turning pale at the idea of Bessy's hearing of this hateful promise of marriage; "I should prefer any thing to my father's knowing—to any of them down at Maplebury knowing of this woman's pretended claim upon me."

"Then will you give me your word of honour, my dear Charles, that you will not say a word to your father, or to any member of your family, of your having sold your money out of the funds?" demanded Sir George eagerly.

Charles looked puzzled and embarrassed. The idea of having such a secret as this to keep from his family was extremely painful to him, and he ventured to say, "Indeed, Sir George, my father will feel very grateful to you; as I told you when you first mentioned taking my money upon such good interest, and he could not be more so, I am sure, because of your having a second motive, besides your kindness, for doing it."

"You must give me leave to be a judge of that, Mr. Chesterfield," replied the baronet gravely. "I know your father well; he is an excellent man, but he has notions of his own; and I am quite sure that he would not like it well that you and I should have settled this

business without consulting him. In fact, nothing but this entanglement with Mrs. Sherbourne could have led me to do it. When he hears of that, he will understand my motives, and appreciate them properly, but not before."

"But, Sir George," persisted poor Charles, "how much more cause he will have to be angry if the transaction be kept secret from him altogether, than if it has only been arranged without consulting him. So very advantageous as it is to me, he cannot be seriously angry at that, especially, Sir George, as he knows, I dare say, your prompt way of doing business that you speak of."

"Very well, Mr. Charles Chesterfield. Of course you are perfectly the master of yourself and of your actions. You may communicate, or you may conceal, precisely which you choose —far be it from me to attempt to assume any control, or even influence over you. But in the same manner that I leave you free, I expect that you will leave me so; and I tell you with the honest frankness which you ought by this time to know is the most remarkable feature in my character, that whenever you inform your father, or any of your relatives, that you have sold your money out of the funds, and placed it in my hands, I shall forthwith inform them

what the motive was which induced me to permit your doing so, without writing to consult them on the subject. I mean to say—understand me clearly—I never permit the slightest equivocation or uncertainty to rest on any words of mine—I mean to say that, whenever you inform them of this transfer of your money to me, I shall inform them of your promise of marriage to Mrs. Sherbourne."

"Then both the one and the other shall remain secret, Sir George," replied the embarrassed young man, whose objections to his misadventure being known at Maplebury, grew stronger the more he thought of it. "I do give you the promise you require, and hereby pledge you my word and honour never to mention the subject to my father or any of my family as long as you will keep the other secret too."

"Very well, my dear fellow, that is as it should be," said Sir George, cordially holding out his hand to him. "It would be a thousand pities if you and I should ever have any lasting dispute, our real feelings and principles are so completely in unison."

Exceedingly touched, and exceedingly flattered, Charles pressed respectfully the offered

hand, and said with a smile that marked his entire satisfaction, "Now then, my dear Sir George, have the kindness to tell me what it is I ought to say to Mrs. Sherbourne about my money?"

To conceal nothing from the courteous reader, it must be confessed that this question found Sir George Meddows totally unprepared with an answer. His first object had been to get possession of Charles Chesterfield's legacy; his second, to conceal the whole transaction from the friendly but shrewd old farmer, and further than that "his habits of business" had not yet carried him. But he was not a man to be easily disconcerted by a question, and raising his hand to his chin with a look of much meditative wisdom, he said, after the interval of two or three minutes, "The object we have in view, Charles, is distinct and clear enough, that we must of course take care not to lose sight of. But as to the manner of it, there may be room for doubt. In the course of to-morrow, however, I will make a sort of sketch of the letter which I think you ought to write to her."

Charles was all gratitude. That evening he accompanied his distinguished friend to the

theatre, and feeling convinced that his affairs were speedily drawing to the crisis which would immediately enable him to return to Maplebury, now become to his imagination the only haven of rest in which he desired to find himself, he once more felt himself a fortunate and happy man; and though smiling at the folly which had once led him to fancy that he should find happiness any where else, he yet rejoiced to think how much he should have to talk about, how much to describe when he next found himself seated beside little Bessy in the orchard. Sometimes, it is true, he recalled the style of his last letter to her, and his very ears tingled as he remembered how many times he had called her "little girl;" but he got over this by mentally exclaiming, "And so she is! she is a little girl, and a most angelic little girl. And when she finds I think her so still, she will forgive my letters for being rather more stupid than my sonnets."

At a rather late breakfast on the following morning, Sir George presented to him the draught of a letter to Mrs. Sherbourne. "You see what habits of business are, Charles," said he. "I suppose you have been sleeping snugly, while I have been at work for you. Read this

over, and tell me if you do not think it will answer our purpose."

Charles took the paper with a little trepidation, and read as follows:—

"Madam,

"The nature of your attachment to me from the very beginning has become so evident, that I scruple not to treat your present course of proceeding with the unceremonious frankness which must be most convenient to both of us. The action which you threaten to bring has doubtless for its object the obtaining a portion of the legacy which you have heard spoken of, as damages. I therefore think it right to inform you, that this legacy has passed from my hands into those of a gentleman to whom I have paid it as a debt of honour, so that I am now the same penniless individual that I was before this little fortune came to me. If, however, your attachment is not of the mercenary kind which I have been led to suppose, and that from motives of real affection you are still willing to be my wife, destitute as I am, this proof of your sincerity will at once remove all my doubts, and find me perfectly willing to renew the engagement."

Sir George Meddows sat watching Charles with a sort of triumphant chuckle as he perused these lines, and felt both indignation and disappointment upon perceiving that instead of the satisfaction which they were expected to produce, the countenance of young Chesterfield expressed nothing but dismay. Having reached its conclusion, the astounded young man folded up the paper, and laying it as far from himself and as near to Sir George as he conveniently could, said with an air of simple and profound astonishment, "But there is no truth in it, Sir George."

The baronet laughed. The laugh was about half genuine, and half affected. "Ah! I see now," said his comforted companion, "you are only making fun of Mrs. Sherbourne, and of me too perhaps. But, dear Sir George, do tell me, in serious earnest, what you think I had better say to her? Of course you do not mean I should send this."

Sir George Meddows took counsel with himself for a moment as to the importance of the rustic lad's opinion of him at this advanced period of their acquaintance, and speedily came to the conclusion that at present it mattered

not a pin whether he thought him an angel or a demon, a saint or a sinner. Nevertheless, though he condescended not to change his mode of proceeding, he was willing to give it as fair an appearance as might be, and answered lightly, that he had no jest in his thoughts, but added, "You probably do not very clearly understand the nature of the business you are upon, Mr. Chesterfield. When you know the world a little better, you will become aware of the necessity, imperative upon all men, of using for defence, pretty nearly the same weapons as those with which they are attacked. Were your *inamorata* a lady of high principle and unblemished integrity, every word addressed to her should be marked by these attributes; but as the case stands, you are lost, if in your skirmishing you use not foils of the self same length as her own."

Charles mused for a moment or two, as if endeavouring fully to understand the meaning of what had been said to him, and then replied—"I am sure you know best about every thing, excepting just what nobody can tell exactly except myself. How *can* I tell her that I am ready to marry her, when I know in

my own heart that I would rather lose every farthing I have got in the world, than do any such thing."

"Then tell her this, Mr. Chesterfield, if you think your doing so will stop the action. But I doubt if you would find it succeed."

"No, no, Sir George, I don't want to tell her any thing about it; and I do not see there is any need that I should. What I hoped you would be kind enough to explain to me was, the nature of my loan to you, which, if I understood you rightly, would render a verdict for damages of no use to her."

"Most assuredly the loan you have made is of that nature," replied the baronet, with a peculiar smile, that was not unusual with him. "And as to the phrase, '*debt of honour*,' you may safely use it, without at all wounding your conscience—for you did once owe me a hundred pounds you know, which was decidedly a debt of honour, inasmuch as I had taken no security for it—and the paying this was a part of the transaction. Take my word for it, my good fellow, the best thing you can do will be to copy this letter, and send it off, without making any more fuss about it; and as he

spoke, Sir George pushed the paper back towards his companion.

Harassed and puzzled, poor Charles once more opened the paper and read it; but though much more aware than he had at first been of the excellent effect which it was calculated to produce upon the lady, he was, if possible, more conscious also of its falsehood; and the bold words, "I never told a lie in my life, Sir George," were on his lips, but as he raised his head to utter them, he perceived such an expression of haughty contempt on the countenance of the baronet, that he checked himself, and suddenly feeling that he was bound to him by no tie which exacted either obedience or confidence beyond what was convenient to himself, he pocketed the paper with an air of such quiet composure as somewhat to puzzle his sharp-witted patron, and said—"I am sure it is exceedingly kind of you, Sir George, to take so much trouble about it; but the sun is shining so gloriously upon the sea, and the pier looks so very delightful, that I must go and enjoy it a little before I think any more about this tiresome business—I shall have plenty of time to write afterwards."

A newspaper, together with several letters, were handed to Sir George at this moment, which stopped whatever reply he might have been going to make; and hastily finishing his breakfast, Charles made a silent unseen bow and departed, leaving the baronet deeply engaged with his despatches, and betaking himself according to his proclaimed intention to the enjoyment of a bright wintry sun; but the morning did not pass without his having composed the following amended version of Sir George's epistle.

"Madam,

"The nature of your attachment to me has become so evident, that I scruple not to treat your present course of proceeding with the frankness which must be most convenient to both of us. The action which you threaten to bring against me, has doubtless for its object the obtaining a portion of the legacy which you have heard spoken of, as damages. I therefore think it right to inform you that this legacy has passed from my hands in a manner which prevents its being available to any such object.

"I remain, Madam,

"Your obedient Servant,

"CHARLES CHESTERFIELD."

This amended epistle was put into the post before he met his patron at dinner, and he had reason to rejoice at having been so prompt, as he would have found small leisure for writing afterwards. Sir George rang the bell sharply the moment he appeared; "Let us have dinner the instant it is ready," he said to the servant who answered it; then turning to Charles he continued, "You must not think of dressing, my good fellow, I must be off for town to-night—and I think you had better accompany me. I have for some time been only waiting the result of a consultation of physicians well acquainted with my case, in order to decide upon taking a short tour on the continent: I have received their approval of this scheme by this morning's post, as I should have told you directly, had you not bolted in such a hurry. But with this I received other letters also, mentioning circumstances which render it necessary for me to settle two or three trifling affairs before I leave England. You know my regular habits of business, Charles, and will not wonder at my being in a hurry to finish whatever there is to be done. Of course, my dear fellow, you will now return home immediately, and I have great pleasure in thinking what a much smarter fellow I send back

than I brought out with me—and a wiser one too, I have no doubt of it. Here comes a summons to dinner—that's well, for we have not a moment to lose. The coach starts at ten, and you must get your things together as soon as you have dined. My man has been at the same work for me all the morning."

This hurried movement considerably startled young Chesterfield: but obedience being inevitable, he gave himself very little trouble concerning the motives which led to the command he had received, and leaping the not very agreeable interval that must occur before he started again from London on his journey homeward, he fixed his thoughts almost wholly on that dear home itself, and on all the cherished objects it contained; every one of which had resumed its proper niche in his heart, from the moment the film engendered by his wild literary hopes fell from his eyes. The night journey, therefore, though his companion was either sleepy, sad, or sulky (for he never uttered a word), was far from disagreeable, as between waking and sleeping dreams, he passed the whole time that it lasted in the most agreeable manner that a night journey could permit.

On arriving in town, the stage was exchanged for a hack, that speedily rattled them to Bruton-street, where the bills upon the windows announcing that it was still to let, accounted for the continued residence there of Mrs. Longuéville and Clara, which had been prolonged some days beyond the period at first proposed.

The greatly reduced household were all fast asleep, and the difficulty of obtaining an entrance seemed to complete the discomfiture of the lively baronet's temper, for he swore vehemently before the lagging doors of his once gay mansion opened to receive him, and as he entered them, he uttered something so like a groan that Chesterfield started.

It is not an uncommon thing for persons entering even their own mansions unexpectedly, and at an hour which custom dedicates to repose, to give especial directions that no one shall be disturbed before their usual time of rising; but Sir George Meddows was not one of these. He ordered the *Dustabell* who let them in, first to awaken Miss Meddows without a moment's delay, and desire her to come immediately to make his breakfast, and then to return again, without a moment's delay, to light a fire in

the library, which being done, Sir George sat himself down beside it in a state of mind by no means enviable.

There exists in all *very* highly civilized parts of the world a race of male human beings, who, after having forfeited successively, and sometimes in very rapid succession, every openly recognised claim to respect from their fellow creatures, contrive to avoid the penalty consequent on the loss of it, by boldly enacting a code of their own, in which the relative positions of virtue and vice, according to the classification of the vulgar, is so far reversed, as to render a practical defiance of the old-fashioned decalogue no impediment whatever to the very highest consideration and esteem. This species of conventional toleration would be much less remarkable were it wholly confined to those benefited by it; but, till one becomes used to it, the effect of seeing this sort of gentry received with distinguished consideration in all fashionable circles, and treated as something too precious to be examined freely, is somewhat startling to the moral sense. Such is the case, however; and few persons owed more to this species of voluntary blindness in those with whom they associated, than Sir

George Meddows. In so slight a sketch of this accomplished gentleman as the progress of Charles Chesterfield's adventures has rendered necessary, any detailed rehearsal of his various claims to distinction as a man of fashion would be out of place ; but enough has been said to make it conceivable that, notwithstanding his peculiarly regular habits of business, he might find himself occasionally in difficulties which threatened to dash him, by a most Satan-like descent, from the heaven of elegant indifference to the grimey depths of a spunging-house. Though not quite so witty a manas the immortal spendthrift, who not unfrequently paid the claims which called for gold by a sparkling currency of his own, as bright and almost as precious as diamonds, Sir George Meddows had great mental resources. He was plausible, yet keen; seemingly frank, while beyond sounding, false; and so boldly unscrupulous as to all ways and means which did not threaten to involve discovery, as to render him a very perfect master of elegant dishonesty. Yet, notwithstanding all the chartered privileges of an insolvent of *bon ton*, there are some few ticklish points in their code, which having reference only to their own mutual convenience,

and being perfectly independent of any vulgar consideration for the insignificant class who furnish the clique with the necessaries of life, are adhered to and obeyed with almost superstitious reverence. Rather than infringe such and live, many a very life-loving individual has sent a brace of bullets through his brains; and rather than infringe such and die, many more of the same class have violated other claims ten thousand times more sacred, and reduced wife and children to want bread, rather than be pointed at as a defaulter in the only pecuniary engagement in which honesty has nothing to do.

It was under the *peine forte et dure* of a pressing claim of this kind, that Sir George Meddows had made his present visit to town. The same post which had brought him that sort of gentle hint from an *honourable* dun, from which neither wit nor wile can procure an escape, brought also a letter from Arthur Dalrymple, stating his intention of waiting upon him at Brighton, for the purpose of settling the business they had to transact, previous to his setting off for St. Petersburg, if it would be more convenient for Sir George to see him there than in town. Unfortunately for the gay baronet, this latter claim, though a just one, was, from circumstances

which had given it considerable notoriety, almost as imperative as the former one. From the time, however, that Sir George had got rid of the importunate Mr. Cromwell, by the aid of a loan from Dalrymple, he had felt no other anxiety respecting this, as well as the other claims which his ward had against him, than what arose from the unlucky month or two by which the majority of Arthur Dalrymple preceded that of Charles Chesterfield. Concerning his power of obtaining possession of poor Charles's little fortune, he had never entertained the slightest doubt; and the satisfaction which he felt when the transaction was completed, arose chiefly from knowing that he might now be released from the bore of the foolish lad's presence. But unfortunately the four thousand pounds thus obtained, though somewhat more than was due to Dalrymple, was by no means sufficient to satisfy both that and the still more pressing claim of his purely *honourable* creditor; and he now sat beside the comfortless-looking impromptu breakfast which his yawning valet spread before him, in deep rumination of the ways and means by which he might get clear of both.

So thoroughly had he already availed himself

of every possible mode of raising money, that one only resource was now left him, and it certainly was not without something a little like an honest pang at his heart that he at length resolutely determined to avail himself of it—for this last resource was the fortune of Clara. Besides this passing pang at the idea of robbing her of her last shilling, he had moreover a great aversion to making the request, for he knew it could only be done effectually by making her comprehend the necessity for it. She could neither be mystified, like Charles, into a belief that the transaction was a profitable one; nor be persuaded to consider it her duty to administer to the extravagance which it was the constant object of her life to check.

Nevertheless, he was as sure of success with her, as he had before been with Charles; for he was certain that he had only to state his inability to settle with Mr. Dalrymple without her assistance in order to obtain it. "And after all," thought he, "I have no doubt, or at least very little, that he will end by making her his wife, and then this trifle will not signify a straw, There can be no question about their liking each other, and there would be fifty times more chance of my spoiling the match by showing

myself up as a ruined man, than by privately making Clara understand how greatly I want her assistance."

This train of reasoning proved so thoroughly successful, that by the time his daughter had completed her hasty toilet, and stood before him, he felt perfectly ready to eat his breakfast, and set about the parental robbery at the same time.

"How do, Clara dear? Mercy on me, child! London in the dead season does not seem to agree better with you than it does with me. It is a horrid climate, except just when the air is fanned and revivified, as it were, by the rapid evolutions of aristocratic equipages. In sober earnest, you look exceedingly pale, and if I had not decided upon a continental trip before, I should certainly do so now, and that solely for your sake, my love."

Clara assured him that she was perfectly well, and then made some inquiries upon this new travelling plan, of which she had as yet heard nothing, and which in truth inspired her with no very pleasant anticipations.

"To tell you the truth, Clara," said her father in reply, "I rejoice that your aunt's lie-a-bed propensities will leave us *tête-à-tête* for a

little while this morning, as I have some very important business on which to consult you. I have sent young Chesterfield off on an errand to the City on purpose, and told him to breakfast at a coffee-house, as I was going to be busy; so that I may now have the comfort of opening my heart to you, my dear girl, without interruption; and with such a daughter, this is the greatest comfort a harassed father can have."

Must it be accounted as one of the good or the evil features of Clara's fortune, that nothing which her father did or said could deceive her? Neither his lively sallies, nor his impromptu jokes, his cajoling fondness, nor his careless *insouciance,* could ever persuade her that he was not labouring in his incessant vocation of seeming what he was not. Any uninitiated spectator, who had witnessed the cold reception which she now gave to his offered confidence, would have classed her as a young woman of hard unfeeling temper, and him, good man, as one of the most unfortunate fathers in the world. Nor would such a spectator have been altogether wrong as to the latter clause, for Clara was as far as possible from being such a daughter as Sir George Meddows would have wished for. It was, unquestionably, exceedingly annoying to

read pain, doubt, and distrust, in the anxious look which fixed itself on his, as he spoke. "Confound the girl's eyes!" he murmured inwardly; "what a cursed way she has of looking in one's face."

The business a-foot, however, was not of a nature to be remitted upon any discouragement which the pale Clara's eyes could give; and getting rid of their discomfiting influence by fixing his own on his plate, he resumed:

"I am devilish sorry to tell you, my dear Clara, that I find we have been living too fast. Not but what my habits of business would have protected me, of course, from all inconvenience of this kind, had it not been that, in an evil hour, my goodnature and kindness of heart beguiled me into becoming security for a friend. I give you my honour, Clara, that when I did this, I believed the fellow to be as honourable a man as myself; or otherwise, for your sake, my dear child, I should have been more cautious. Never again, Clara, will I be guilty of such imprudence. You who know my habits of business must be as much astonished at it as I am myself. But we are none of us wise at all times! Be this as it may, however, it is useless, and worse than useless, to waste time

and thought on what is done. The poet is right, my dear child, when he says—

'Not Jove himself has power upon the past.'

So no more of what I have done, let us rather concentrate all our wisdom as to the best manner of repairing it."

Here Sir George paused, and looked with an air of smiling fondness into his daughter's face, as if to give and receive consolation. But Clara said not a word, and now in her turn seemed anxious to avoid all communing with eyes, for she too fixed her glances upon her plate.

"You are aware, my love," resumed Sir George, now sighing deeply, "you are aware that Dalrymple is of age, and is now in town, expressly for the purpose of settling accounts with me. You are aware of this, are you not, dear Clara?"

Dear Clara replied as steadily as she could, that she knew Mr. Dalrymple was of age, but not that he was in town.

"Yes, he is here—and unless something can be done amongst us to prevent it, I must submit to the eternal disgrace of telling him that I

am four thousand pounds in his debt, but that I have no means of paying him."

Clara changed colour; she first blushed violently, and then became paler than before. But still she spoke not.

"What can be done? For God's sake, Clara, give me your advice. What can be done to save us all from this withering disgrace?" said her father, suddenly slapping his forehead with his hand, and looking rather desperate.

This species of melo-dramatic performance did Clara good; she saw how completely he was acting, and had she not known that he had received rents for Dalrymple, she might have even hoped that the whole history of his debt was a fable; nor was her sympathy at all increased when he rose from his chair, and seizing her hand, said in the most approved style of tragic intensity, "Clara! My honour is in your keeping. Will you save me? Will you lend me, only for a few short weeks perhaps, the four thousand pounds required to pay this dreadful debt?"

If the being prepared for this demand could have enabled her to receive it with composure, she would not have trembled so violently, for

she had guessed most accurately what was coming, from the moment he had mentioned his wish for confidential conversation with her. To do Mrs. Longuéville justice, it must be stated, that while keeping a most strict guard over every shilling of her own property, she had not failed to point out to her niece the absolute necessity of preserving the little independence she possessed; openly avowing her fears that Sir George was involved, and very eloquently insisting upon the obvious fact, that if these fears were just, the kindest and most dutiful thing his daughter could do, would be to retain the power of giving him, at least, the necessaries of life, should his imprudence ever place him in want of them. This sort of conversation, frequently repeated, had naturally in some degree prepared Clara for the present scene; and when it began, she moved herself with all the resolution of which she was mistress, in order to prevent the weakness which might tempt her to give up what she was quite convinced it was her duty to keep. But the introduction of Dalrymple's name into the business had totally overset all her reasonings, and shaken all her resolutions. A thousand feelings which she

would have found it impossible to explain, made her conscious that no foregone conclusions on the subject could settle the question of yielding or not yielding, as it now stood, and the very utmost efforts of her self-command could only enable her to say—"I must beg time to think, papa, before I answer you. You must, sir, allow me a little time before I can decide."

Sir George's habits of business led him to wince a little at this delay, which he not only feared might be dangerous, but knew to be inconvenient; yet after a slight word or two, indicative of his wish that the matter might be settled at once, he yielded to it with the best grace he could; for there was that in Clara's look and manner which convinced him he had judged rightly in believing that the shame of this debt to Dalrymple was more than she could bear.

"Well then, be it so, my dearest child!" said he, in a tone of melancholy submissiveness. "I have done my duty. I have placed my own honour, and the honour of your name and race in your hands, and I will await your fiat with patience, however agonizing the uncertainty may be."

"The uncertainty shall not last long, father,"

she replied. To-day is Wednesday—on Friday I will tell you how I have decided to act"—and so they parted; Sir George leaving the house at as early an hour as he deemed it respectable to be seen in the streets, and poor Clara retreating to her little sitting room, to ruminate and chew the end of fancies that had considerably less of sweet than bitter in them.

CHAPTER V.

Important Interview between the Hero and Miss Meddows, which leads the Young Lady to conduct herself in a very independent style.

The weeks which they had passed together at Brighton had greatly increased the friendly intimacy between Miss Meddows and Charles Chesterfield. Rejoiced for his sake that his visions of metropolitan renown had vanished and left him in possession of his sober senses, she had taken a benevolent pleasure in leading him to converse of his home, of his family—of Mr. Westbrook, and even of little Bessy; and in observing how rapidly the idea of being restored to them was effacing from his mind all

the mortifying sensations produced by his failure. It was, therefore, without any feeling of displeasure or surprise, that in about four hours after she had quitted the breakfast table, which had been the scene of the foregoing conversation, he appeared at the door of her retreat.

"Come in, Mr. Chesterfield," she said kindly. though not greatly delighted at being obliged to talk of indifferent things, when her heart and head were so deeply occupied by her own sad position. But Clara had laboured to watch over the interests and welfare of Charles, from the moment that she found the strange project of bringing him to London was inevitable. She knew that she had saved him from many mortifications, and on more than one occasion had guarded his little purse from the laughing, lively, depredations of his patron. All this made her feel an interest in him; for nothing is more true than that kindness is engendered quite as much by the performance of kind offices, as by the receiving them.

"Do I interrupt you, Miss Meddows?" said the young man, remaining on the threshold, with the handle of the lock in his hand; "tell me to go, if I do."

"No, no, I shall not tell you to go, indeed,

It is a great while since I saw you last, Mr. Chesterfield, and I really want to talk to you a little about your future plans. Are you aware that my father talks of going abroad?"

"Yes, Miss Meddows, he told me so himself; but it was only an hour or two before we set off in the coach for London, and we did not talk at all as we came along, so that I know very little about it. Are you going too, Miss Meddows, and Mrs. Longuéville?"

"But about yourself, Mr. Chesterfield: let us think of that first. What are your own plans? I hope you mean to return home immediately. Depend upon it this will be your best course."

"Indeed I do, Miss Meddows," he replied, "and I cannot thank you enough for this good advice, as well as for all your other kindness to me since I have been here. That is the only part of the business that I shall ever look back to with pleasure. Not but what Sir George has been very kind and obliging, too; but a gentleman who is so much a man of business as Sir George, cannot be expected to have time, you know, to talk with me in the same kind way that you have done. Let me live as long as I may, I never shall forget your goodness."

"I am very glad, dear Charles, if I have been

a comfort to you," replied Clara, softened into a greater degree of familiarity than she had ever before used, by the earnest gratitude expressed in his countenance and voice. "Oh! how glad you will be to find yourself at home again, and in the midst of those who love you! I almost envy your feelings at returning to your sweet pleasant home after all the dust, and smoke, and weariness of London. How delighted you will be to see them all! And what joy you will feel at seeing the joy you cause!"

"Yes, Miss Meddows, so I shall indeed," returned Charles, musingly. "But I should be more delighted still, if it were not for one thing that makes me feel very uncomfortable."

"And what is that, Mr. Chesterfield?" inquired Clara. Charles shook his head, and smiled somewhat sorrowfully; and then, after the pause of a moment, said with very ingenuous sincerity—"If you would call me Charles again, Miss Meddows, I think I should have courage enough to tell you, and I should like to do so very much, for I feel as if I wanted good advice. I think you would be able to tell me in a moment what I ought and what I ought not to do: I am sure I should be easier if I were to tell

you about it, and there is nothing in the world to prevent my doing it."

"Then do it, Charles," replied the young lady, smiling. "I assure you I feel that you are paying me a great compliment, and I shall be anxious to prove that I deserve it. If my advice can really be useful to you, I shall rejoice."

"Then you shall know all—all, I mean, that weighs upon my mind, and makes me feel that I shall not be quite happy even at home. But before you can quite understand this, Miss Meddows, I must tell you that before the legacy was left to me, we were a very happy family indeed, without any secrets at all; and I cannot help thinking that this must always be a great cause of happiness in a house, because if nobody has any secrets to hide, nobody can be afraid to speak what comes into their head, and that makes every thing gay. So you see, Miss Clara, I have never been used to have any secrets to keep; and therefore perhaps you won't wonder at my feeling uneasy at having one to carry home with me?"

"No, indeed, my good friend," replied Clara; "nothing, I think, can be more natural: and

without hearing any more about it, I feel inclined to think that whatever may be the secret which weighs upon your mind, your best course will be to destroy it at once, by not permitting it to remain a secret. I am sure that were I you, I should open my heart to my brother; it must be a great comfort to have a brother."

"It is indeed, especially such a brother as mine. But now comes the difficulty, Miss Meddows. Sir George (all my secret is about Sir George, so you see I have nothing to be ashamed of) particularly said that none of my family must know it. If it was not for that, I should not mind it. If I was but at liberty to tell my good brother Christopher, I don't think I should be so miserable about the rest, at least not just for a little while; for I will answer for it he would manage to break it to my father before long."

The mention of her father made Clara start. Till then, she had felt that she should be as well pleased to keep her young friend to generalities, avoiding the discussion of his private concerns which he seemed desirous of leading her to. But now a restless and painful anxiety seized upon her; she sat steadfastly silent, however, feeling almost guilty, from her eager desire to

know what it was evident her father was particularly anxious to conceal. But poor Clara's fears were already alive and awake on every subject in which he was concerned; nor did it require more words than young Chesterfield had already uttered, to rouse again all the pecuniary terrors on his account, from which she had suffered on his first introduction. Her silence did not long impede the communication of all she most dreaded to hear; for the ice once broken, Charles required no greater encouragement than her listening attitude, to make him proceed with the whole story.

"Well then, Miss Meddows, the secret, after all, is only this: Sir George, who, as of course I need not tell you, is certainly the most complete man of business in the world, knowing that as soon as I came of age I had the right and the power to do what I liked with my money, most kindly entered into conversation with me about it; and, knowing what a very small interest the stocks bring in, proposed with the greatest liberality, to take the whole of the money himself upon his own personal security. I am sure I can never be grateful enough for his taking so much trouble about me, not to mention his generosity in paying such interest for it

as would amount to three times as much as I should receive from the funds. You won't want me to tell you what my answer was, Miss Meddows? Only I declare to you I felt so overpowered by his generous kindness, that I was hardly able to answer at all. I felt tears in my eyes, I promise you; and had I not," he added with a sigh,—"had I not had good reason, as you know, to doubt my powers as a poet, I am sure that I should have recorded the transaction in verse. Every thing was soon settled between us, and your good father was gayer afterwards, than I have seen him for a long time. His kind heart was rejoiced, I know, at having done a generous action. But then came the drawback, Miss Clara. Sir George had more than one kind motive for asking me to place my money in his hands. You remember all about that foolish business with Mrs. Sherbourne, and the trouble I was in about it when I came down to Brighton?"

"Perfectly!" replied Clara, articulating even that single word with difficulty, and feeling so sick and faint as to make the sitting upright a task requiring great exertion.

"And perhaps you remember, too, that more than once before you left Brighton, your father

was so kind as to say, but without fully explaining himself, that he had thought upon a scheme for getting me out of the scrape,—something that was to put Mrs. Sherbourne's absurd notions out of her head?"

Clara bowed her head in assent, but attempted not to speak.

"Well then, I think I can make you understand it all. Sir George says, and I am quite sure he is right, that Mrs. Sherbourne never cared a farthing for me, excepting for the sake of my legacy, and that she only threatens to bring an action against me for the sake of getting damages out of it. The best and only way to stop her, therefore, was to place my money where, as your father tells me, she could not get it, and by his advice I have written to tell her that this is done. But notwithstanding all I have said against secrecy, Miss Meddows, I have a very particular reason for not liking that any of this nonsense about Mrs. Sherbourne should be known at Maplebury. But Sir George says that if I will not tell *that*, which was his principal reason, you see, for advising me to place the money in his hands; I must not let my father, or any of my family, know that he has got the money at all. He says that he is

sure my father would not take it well that the transaction should have been completed without his knowledge. But he is quite mistaken, Miss Clara; I am positive that my father would be proud and happy to think that Sir George had undertaken the management of my little fortune. Don't you think that you could persuade Sir George to give me back my promise about not telling of his having my money, without insisting that I should tell this disagreeable history about Mrs. Sherbourne too?"

The only reply made by Clara to this appeal, was a deep groan; and at the same moment dropping her head upon her arms as they rested on the table, she remained as motionless as if she had fainted.

Charles was greatly terrified. He thought that this was the case, that she was suddenly taken ill; and though longing to call her maid to her assistance, he dared not leave her, even to reach the bell, lest she should fall from her chair.

"Dear, dear Miss Clara! Can you not speak? May I lay you on the sofa? Do you hear me? Can you speak to me?"

Greatly was he relieved at seeing her raise her head from the table; but the first glance he obtained of her face renewed all his alarm, for it

was as white as marble, and wore an expression of such broken-hearted misery as wrung his very heart. Pity, astonishment, and alarm, might all be found in the accent with which he exclaimed —" O merciful Heaven! What can I have said to make you look so miserable?"

Poor Clara had indeed not fainted; on the contrary, she had never been more fully in possession of all her senses; and after a moment she replied,

" I am not quite well, Mr. Chesterfield;" and presently added with recovered calmness, " Let me beg you, my good friend, to leave me now. But do not mention the subject we have been talking about to any body, till you have seen me again. Let that be at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon, Mr. Chesterfield, in this room, if you please. I hope that I shall feel better then, and be able to give you some advice that may be useful. Say nothing further to me now, for I am not well."

Charles looked anxiously in her face, but seeing that her colour was returning, no longer resisted her command.

" I will come here exactly at the hour you bid me," he said gently, and then quitted the room.

At the very moment that Charles Chesterfield had presented himself at the door of Clara's sitting-room, she had just come to a decision as to the answer she should give her father respecting the loan he had requested from her. If poor Clara felt for her unworthy parent little of the tenderness which might be supposed likely to influence such a decision, it must not be attributed to her as hardness of nature, or as any deficiency in that first and fondest of all known affection which binds a child to its parent. The greatest misery of her sad existence was the consciousness that she could never feel this more. Gifted with a quickness of perception which had long made all hope, all doubt, respecting his real character impossible, and endowed with a fineness of the moral sense which at once made the glory of her character and the torture of her life, she had no wavernings as to its being right or wrong to leave herself without the means of existence, in order to enable him for a short time longer to indulge his vices. Had this been the question, she would have told him now, as in fact she had almost promised her aunt she would do, in case of need, that she considered it to be her duty, under the circumstances in which she found

herself, carefully to preserve to herself, and perhaps to him, the means of existence. But unhappily this was no longer the question. It remained for her on the present occasion to decide, not whether she was most strongly called upon by duty to deliver over her little fortune to her father, or to retain it in her own hands, but whether any pecuniary advantage whatever could atone to her for the agony of knowing that her name and race were disgraced for ever in the eyes of Arthur Dalrymple.

At the moment Charles Chesterfield entered, she had made up her mind that it could not; and if she listened to him as he opened the conversation with more cheerfulness than might have been expected in her situation, it was owing to the feeling which cheered her heart, despite the wretched prospect before her, because she had the power of sacrificing her own interest to that of one whom she loved so very much better than herself.

But Chesterfield's tale almost turned her to stone. Frequently as she had suspected from time to time that her father contemplated this most nefarious piece of treachery, circumstances had repeatedly occurred which appeared to disprove it; all of which had been eagerly wel-

comed by her, and permitted, probably, to make more impression than they really deserved. The statement she had listened to in the morning would have appeared to her more terrible still, had it not seemed to offer proof, that notwithstanding the present distressing pressure upon him, Sir George had decided against applying to Charles. But now that her long combated fears came upon her in the terrible shape of proved realities, she felt all the hateful iniquity of the transaction ten thousand times more strongly than ever. The ingenuous statement of the poor deluded youth, who had been stripped of his all solely by his confidence in the honour of her father, fell upon her ear like

> "The lep'rous distilment, whose effect
> Holds such an enmity with blood of man,
> That, swift as quicksilver, it courses through
> The natural gates and alleys of the body;
> And, with a sudden vigour, it doth posset
> And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
> The thin and wholesome blood."

It threw her, in fact, into a state a thousand times worse than fainting; for though, for some moments, her bodily strength seemed palsied, her mind was working with agonising activity.

Terrible was the first hour which followed

the closing of the door that shut her in for solitary meditation. For the first part of the time her harassed spirits permitted her to see nothing clearly; she fancied herself unable to decide what she ought to do. Feelings and reasonings, all at war with each other, most grievously tormented her; and the more so because a sort of latent consciousness whispered to her all the while that she ought to know how to act, despite of all the contradictory feelings which assailed her.

But by degrees this wretched state of vacillation gave way before her honest sense of right. Great wrong had been done both to the rich Dalrymple and the poor Chesterfield; but though the pecuniary amount of each might be nearly the same, the real injury committed could hardly be brought into comparison. It was not however without a fearful pang that she permitted herself to settle down into the resolution of devoting her fortune to the liquidation of the claim that was most imperative upon her humanity as well as her honour, for that resolution involved a sort of moral necessity that she should never see, or even wish to see, Arthur Dalrymple more. Yet even so, the decision brought relief, as decision always does; and no

sooner was it fully made, than Clara bent all her thoughts and all her energy to the consideration of the manner in which her righteous purpose could be best effected.

It was now about four o'clock: too late she thought to transact any business in the city, but not too late to pay a visit to a very honest and thoroughly-respectable stock-broker, who lived in Gower-street, and with whom she had been made acquainted by her aunt; who, from the hour she had put on what she was wont when in a playful vein to call "the cap of liberty," *i. e.* her widow's weeds, had shown herself in truth and in spirit as completely a person of business as her more volatile brother affected to be.

Never upon any occasion, whether great or little, had she accepted any of the fraternal offers of service in the management of her money concerns which the attentive Sir George had so assiduously made her. Mr. Stephen Barton had been her only agent, and her only confidant, in the various money transactions which she had found it necessary to perform; and Clara, also, at her recommendation, had in like manner called upon him for his assistance whenever she required any thing in his line.

To this Mr. Stephen Barton she now determined to address herself; and with courage that did her honour, for never in her life had she ventured upon such an independent proceeding before. She put on a sea-side bonnet, and quiet-looking shawl, sallied forth alone, walked as far as Oxford-street, called a hackney-coach, gave the address, and drove to his house in Gower-street.

The old gentleman was just returned from the city to dinner, and being summoned to his drawing-room to attend a young lady, looked most unfeignedly surprised when he recognised Miss Meddows.

He bowed low, and hoped Sir George and her aunt were well.

"Quite well, Sir, I thank you. You are surprised, Mr. Barton, at seeing me here without Mrs. Longuéville," she replied; "but you will be still more so, when I tell you the business upon which I am come. I want you to transfer for me to-morrow morning, at the very earliest hour at which it can be done, four thousand pounds sterling."

The eyebrows of the excellent Mr. Barton mounted to the verge of his wig. "A private marriage, I am afraid, Miss Meddows?"

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you, sir," was her firm reply.

"Then, for God's sake, my dear young lady, what can you want four thousand pounds for?"

Clara felt a little tempted to cut the matter short by looking dignified, and saying that she had come thither to have her business transacted, and not discussed; but she looked in the old gentleman's face, and read at least as much kindness as curiosity there; whereupon she said gently, but with perfect decision of manner,

"I know it is impossible, Mr. Barton, that you can receive such a commission without surprise; nor have I any right to suppose that you know me well enough to prevent your suspecting some great imprudence in a transaction so important, while apparently unauthorised by my friends. I am sorry for this, because I respect you, and would wish that you should respect me. But the imperative nature of the duty which, as I conceive, obliges me to take this step, forbids my listening to any scruples which might interfere with it; and it is therefore, my dear sir, that I am compelled to say, that this

business *must* be done for me, and with as little delay as possible."

Though there was much of kindness and respect in the tone with which this was uttered, there was so much of authority also, that the good broker brought down his eyebrows, made another low bow, and replied, "Miss Meddows, I will not deny that the apparently unadvised manner in which you set about this important business makes it painful to me to assist you in it. I wish I could persuade you to take more time to think of it. You shake your head. It would be folly not to obey your order, madam, for you are your own mistress, and if I will not do it, another will. Moreover, it is very fitting I should remember that I am not your legal adviser, but your obedient broker only."

To this Clara made no other reply than by entering at once into the technicalities of the business in hand. She now informed Mr. Barton, that the sum she had mentioned was to be transferred to the name of Charles Chesterfield.

"Charles Chesterfield!" echoed the old gentleman. "Why it is hardly a week ago since I sold out for Charles Chesterfield the very same sum, or near it."

"That transaction I presume, sir, does in nowise legally interfere with this," observed Miss Meddows, with the very haughtiest look and tone that it was in her power to assume, and which she felt to be absolutely needful in order to cut short all discussion.

"Not the least in the world, madam," replied the old man, somewhat offended by her manner, and quite determined to interfere no further. "Not the least in the world, Miss Meddows. The business shall be done among the earliest transactions of the morning, and vouchers to that effect shall be forwarded to you. Are you still in Bruton-street, madam, residing with Sir George Meddows, your father?"

"Yes, sir. My father talks of letting the house, but for the present we are still there. It is a great object with me, Mr. Barton, to get these vouchers before three o'clock to-morrow. May I depend upon this, sir?"

"Yes, Miss Meddows, you certainly may."

"Then now, Mr. Barton, I must wish you good morning; but ere I depart, let me remove from your mind, if my solemn assurance can do it, the painful impression which I am sure you have received, that you are aiding and abetting

in a blameable transaction. I do pledge you my honour, sir, that this is not the case."

The old man looked at her earnestly, and something a little approaching to a smile moved his features, as he presented his arm to conduct her down stairs. But Clara saw it not; and once more repeating her civil farewell, stepped into her hackney-coach, leaving the worthy broker very satisfactorily convinced that she had spoken truly, and that nothing more blameable was a-foot, than her being about to dispose of her hand in lawful marriage to this said Charles Chesterfield. As to the rather puzzling ins and outs of this four thousand pounds transaction, he could make nothing of it, except the aforesaid conclusion, that a marriage between the parties was about to take place, and that the sale on one side, and the transfer on the other, were necessary preliminaries to it.

CHAPTER VI.

More Confidential Interviews.

Mr. Barton was faithful to his promise; the vouchers reached Clara considerably before three o'clock, and punctually at four, Charles Chesterfield again presented himself at the door of her sitting-room.

Though she had thus far proceeded very successfully, and performed a very important portion of the business before her, it was not all done yet; one delicate and difficult manœuvre remained—namely, the making Charles understand that his money was restored to him, without stating the disgraceful fact, that without her interference it would have been lost to him for

ever. She was nerved for the undertaking however, and welcomed her visiter with a smile.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Charles, with most sincere pleasure at seeing her so well recovered from the terrible seizure he had witnessed yesterday. "How glad I am, Miss Meddows, to see you look so like yourself again."

"Thank you, my good friend, I am much better, and I think I shall be quite well if I find you ready to follow my advice."

"I will do any thing, and every thing you wish, my dear Miss Clara," he replied eagerly, though not without a feeling of surprise at hearing her thus unequivocally say, that her health depended on his conduct. She either perceived, or guessed, that this was the case, and hastened to say—"You must be puzzled to understand, Charles, why I should be so very anxious about your affairs, as to make them a matter of health or sickness with me. Let me explain this to you. From the hour in which I first heard my father's project of bringing you to London, I disapproved of it, and would gladly have prevented it, had it been possible; but we had not become such good friends then, Charles, as we are now, and therefore I could not at that time take the same friendly liberty with

you which, if you do not forbid it, I mean to do now. May I hope that you will not forbid my taking this liberty?"

"Forbid it! O Miss Clara! Can you doubt that I shall be both proud and happy to listen to you?"

"I do not want to make you proud, my good friend, but most truly I wish you to be happy, and I am certainly the more anxious about it, because I am persuaded that your happiness has been very greatly endangered by your accompanying us to town."

This was too true to be contradicted, and Charles replied to it only by a sigh.

"Now then hear me, Charles Chesterfield," resumed Clara, almost solemnly; "the information which you gave me yesterday shocked me greatly, because it made me foresee a great deal of domestic unhappiness for yourself and your family, all, or nearly all of which I cannot but attribute to your unfortunate journey with us; with such an idea, you will do me the justice to believe that I could not feel happy without endeavouring to set things right again. In the first place, let me have the pleasure of assuring you that you have nothing whatever to fear from Mrs. Sherbourne. When you saw me

receive her here, I was ignorant of the facts I have since heard concerning her. It is supposed that her husband is still alive, and, moreover, her conduct has been such, as to prevent the possibility of her appearing in court with such a claim as you speak of. Should it ever be necessary, I shall be able to furnish you with references for the establishment of these facts: meanwhile, trust me, you have no need of any further protection against her. It follows, therefore, as you must perceive, that your selling your property out of the funds without the knowledge of your father, was a very hasty and imprudent measure, and one that cannot but give him, and all your family, great disappointment, pain, and mortification, from the proof it seems to offer of your total want of confidence in them. Surely you must be aware of this yourself?"

Charles absolutely groaned as he listened to these true, but killing words. "Alas, Miss Meddows! Why did I do this deed without consulting you! I see it all now. My poor father will be wounded to the very heart! They never, never, will believe again that I love them better than all the world beside. It is too late now; the deed is done, and cannot be undone; and I not only feel wretched, but guilty."

"Not so, Mr. Chesterfield. Happily I have it in my power to set all right again. You are perhaps not aware that I have a small independent fortune of my own: this has enabled me to transfer four thousand pounds into your name in the funds. The business is already completed, and here are the vouchers."

Charles was very far from guessing at the nature or extent of the benefit which the generous Clara thus conferred upon him; but the having to return to Maplebury with his fortune in *statu quo*, and with no secret concerning it upon his mind, was a degree of happiness that seemed sufficient to drive him almost wild with joy and gratitude. Clara witnessed this joy with lively pleasure, and blessed Heaven that she had saved one victim from the ruin that seemed closing round him. It was necessary, however, or at any rate exceedingly desirable, that Chesterfield should leave London immediately. At an early hour on the following morning it would be necessary for her to inform her father of the transaction which had put it out of her power to afford him any further help; and though it was evident that Charles had suffered too much to render it likely he should fall into the same scrape anew (ignorant though he was of its real

nature), she greatly desired to avoid the possibility of his being again attacked by Sir George; an event which she doubted not would happen, were they to meet after her father knew that the money had been restored to him.

It was this part of her task which she felt to be the most difficult, inasmuch as she could by no means assign her real motives for urging his immediate departure. Aware, however, that she must at this moment have great influence with him, she determined to use it, whether he thought her reasonable or not; and therefore addressed him with something like the authority of an elder sister.

"The pleasure you express at this arrangement delights me, Mr. Chesterfield, for it proves that I was right in thinking that the imprudence you had committed would make your return home very painful to you. I know that you feel grateful to me for having set it all right for you, and I am quite certain that you will comply with my wish that you should leave town either by to-night's mail or the early coach to-morrow. I should be sorry for you to see my father after he knows what I have done, which he will do when we meet at breakfast to-morrow morning, for I have business to transact with him which

will then render the disclosure of it inevitable. You will dine with us to-day, and may then mention having already taken your place. I hope you have no serious objection to this hasty departure?"

"None in the world, Miss Meddows," he replied, in a voice of such gladness that a smile of pleasure once more lit up the lovely but sad features of poor Clara. "I will go this very moment," he said, "and secure a place for to-night—and then run to Baker-street to pay a parting visit to the Gibsons; less, perhaps, from gratitude," he added, with a smile, "than from a wish to let Mrs. Sherbourne know, as I am sure she will through them, that I am peaceably departed without having any fear of her before my eyes."

Having thus testified his ready obedience, he set off, leaving Clara perfectly satisfied with what she had done, but knowing herself to be utterly destitute; certain of having her race and name disgraced for ever, and for ever, in the eyes of Arthur Dalrymple: and anticipating with no very agreeable feelings the interview which awaited her with her father on the morrow. Still she was satisfied, and felt no shadow of regret for the sacrifice she had made.

Charles proceeded with the active step of youth and joy to execute the business before him, and smiled musingly at his own delight when he had succeeded in securing a place for Gloucester by that night's coach. "How strange it is," thought he, "that eight short months should make so complete a change in me. I have been disappointed in all my hopes, yet I feel the happiest fellow in the world. And I am going to leave London, probably for ever, with even greater joy than I felt when I came into it! Dear, dear, Miss Meddows! All the misery I have endured I have owed to myself; but for all my happiness I must thank heaven and her."

From the coach-office he repaired to Baker-street, where he found the Gibson family already returned from their hated dwelling in the country. It was evident that his day of favour there had passed, a discovery which he bore with great fortitude; but the assiduous reading of the four young ladies, (Marianna had very quietly married her cousin about a month before), and the uninterrupted industry of their mamma, who hardly raised her eyes from the mass of appropriate engravings which Mr. Marchmont had kindly collected for her Milton during her absence, rendered it difficult for him to sustain

A farewell visit to the Gibsons.

any conversation whatever, and he felt himself obliged to abandon his scheme of naming Mrs. Sherbourne, and sending by them such a message as she must, though they might not, understand.

Fortunately, however, he met Mr. Gibson on the landing-place, and as the disgrace of Charles with Mr. Marchmont was one of the many bits of gossip discussed only *en petit comité*, he had never heard of it. Remembering, therefore, his former favour with his lady, and still better the friendship expressed for him by Mr. Dalrymple, the unsuspecting father and husband received him with all his former zealous hospitality, and immediately asked him to dinner.

"I cannot dine with you, Mr. Gibson," he replied, "but I should be glad to have five minutes chat with you in the front drawing-room, if you please?"

"Certainly, my dear sir, certainly," replied the master of the house, throwing open the door of the cold and deserted apartment, and suddenly taking it into his head that it was very likely the young man was come to propose for one of his daughters. "I am afraid you will find it very cold; however, it shall be just as you please—either here or in the next room with the fire and the

ladies—just as you please, Mr. Chesterfield, I am delighted to see you in any way."

"You are very obliging, sir, and I shall not detain you in the cold for a moment. But I wished to shake hands with you, Mr. Gibson, before I leave London, and to thank you for your kindness to me; and I also wished to request you would have the goodness, when you see Mrs. Sherbourne, to tell her that I am returned to my family in Gloucestershire—here is my address, Mr. Gibson,—and that if she has any further communications to make to me, I can receive them there."

"Going—are you really?" returned the disappointed father; "then there is no more to be said—and I wish you very well, sir, in your health till we meet again. And I am to give this to Mrs. Sherbourne, am I? I won't fail, you may depend upon it. My best regards to Mr. Dalrymple, when you see him. Good morning, sir, good morning."

Rather before Charles was fairly out of the house, Mr. Gibson had ventured to enter the sacred conclave of the back drawing-room for the purpose of discussing with his charming womankind the departure of Mr. Dalrymple's young friend, Charles Chesterfield, and also of

showing the address he had left for Mrs. Sherbourne.

"Funny, isn't it my love, his leaving his address for her?"

"It is extremely absurd," returned Mrs. Gibson, "and just like such a country oaf as he has shown himself. Give it to me, Gibson; I will take care it shall get to her;—I am certain of seeing, or sending to her."

The evening, as usual, brought Mr. Marchmont, who, faithful as the needle to the pole, rarely passed a day without pouring a portion of his noble thoughts, and little anxieties, his magnificent imaginings, and his small realities, into the gently-tender, but exemplarily-discreet bosom of his devoted friend.

The mention of the rebellious young man's farewell visit, and the exhibition of the address left for Mrs. Sherbourne, seemed by no means devoid of interest in the eyes of the Regenerator, and he even condescended to say,—"Give me the bit of paper, dear friend, and I will take it to her. I shall see her on a matter of business to-morrow, so I may save you any further trouble about it."

* * * * *

It is to be hoped that Mrs. Sherbourne's

literary engagement with Mr. Marchmont has not been forgotten by the courteous reader. This engagement, indeed, though not laying claim to novelty, inasmuch as something exceedingly similar to it recently occurred in Paris, was of a nature sufficiently remarkable to deserve some little attention, and therefore, while our hero wends his rumbling way to his native shades, the termination of it shall be briefly recorded.

Not quite comprehending how a lady, in the peculiar state of mind of Mrs. Sherbourne, could have any interest in the whereabouts of such a personage as Charles Chesterfield, Mr. Marchmont's first care on the following morning was to make a visit to the cell of the self-condemned in Mount-street.

Mrs. Sherbourne, notwithstanding her mortuary state of mind, was little changed in dress or manner since we last parted from her. The entire collection of her various charms was as much at her command as ever; nevertheless, when Mr. Marchmont entered, the only one of all the enchanting throng permitted to appear was gentle, desponding languor. The delicate left hand hung listlessly by her side, while the delicate right hand held a pen suspended over

a sheet of half-covered paper, as if waiting for the inspiration that should set it in motion. Her large eyes were raised to greet him, but then fell again as if the very lids sought repose, while her very ringlets seemed to droop in sorrow, and her drapery, too, carelessly arranged, evidently shared the same species of desponding listlessness which pervaded her whole appearance. She intended to look like a lily on a broken stalk,—and perhaps she did.

"I hope you are better to-day in health and spirits, Mrs. Sherbourne?" said the Regenerator, who, having determined immediately to print her Memoirs in weekly numbers, began to fear that the promised catastrophe would be delayed longer than might be convenient, and that it was high time to enquire about it.

"Better?—Yes, much better, Mr. Marchmont. Better by the hours that I have drawn nearer to my longed-for end!"

"You still go on writing, I see. If you really persevere in your shocking intention, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne, it is extraordinary that you should have strength and spirits for it," said the purchaser of her Memoirs, looking at her with rather a suspicious glance.

"I have yet an object for which to live a few

weeks longer," she replied. "In preparing for the event which is about to come upon me, and dividing papers which I wish to destroy, from others that may perhaps prove of some interest when I am no more, I chanced to light upon a correspondence between myself and one of the chief actors in that peculiarly interesting transaction which took place some years ago between a certain lord and lady whose adventures I think never will be forgotten while the language lasts. Every letter of the whole series is preserved. They are full of piquant anecdotes, and my object is to incorporate the whole into the narrative of my own eventful life.—You know these names, Mr. Marchmont?"

Mrs. Sherbourne languidly, and as if by a strong effort, turned towards him the unfinished page, and pointed to the words he was to read, though her delicate fingers trembled as she did so.

"Know them? Egad, their names, at least, are no great mystery. You are quite right, Mrs. Sherbourne, if you can bring out any thing new on that subject, not to omit it. It will be a great addition."

"It is agony to me now, to labour at any thing. But there is a poor old woman, who

nursed my sickly infancy, for whom I am determined to make a small sum before my lips open to receive what fools call poison, but which I call peace. If you will pay me for these pages you shall have them, Marchmont. I have no earthly tribunal to fear, and therefore I have written boldly. The pages on this subject I know are worth their weight in gold. What will you give me for them?"

"We will talk of that presently, Mrs. Sherbourne," replied the Regenerator. "But I want you to explain to me, why you, in your very peculiar and melancholy situation, should think it worth while to enter into correspondence with a young fellow like Charles Chesterfield. What can be your motive for it?"

"He has made you his confidant, has he?" exclaimed the lady with sudden energy, and losing in an instant every trace of languor. "A pretty puppy, isn't he? But if you are his friend and adviser, Mr. Marchmont, be pleased to tell him that I have not done with him yet, and that if he is a wise man, he will come to me immediately. His doing so may save him from the most fatal exposure and dishonour."

"What am I to think, Mrs. Sherbourne, of this sudden change of manner? Of this explicit

avowal of your interest in one so very little fitted to be in your confidence at this awful period? Gracious Heaven!" he exclaimed, looking earnestly in her face. "Have I been fooled out of my money? are you suddenly loosing your senses, madam? or do you really sit there to laugh at me?"

The lady burst forth at these words into a vehement, but well arranged paroxysm of laughter; and she had not looked more enchanting for years, for this was one of the prettiest things she did, displaying her fine teeth, and permitting sundry capricious involutions of person, all of which displayed advantageously some favourite grace.

The Regenerator was perfectly overpowered by his indignation, and it was some time before he could recover himself sufficiently to speak; but at length he said, "Madam! this is swindling. Are you aware of it? Are you aware of the pains and penalties attached by the law to the act of raising money under false pretences? Are you aware of it?"

"My dear sir," replied the lady in the sweetest accents possible, and retaining no more of her offensive merriment than was expressed in a most charming smile—"My dear Mr.

The Regenerator "done"

Marchmont, do you intend to go to law with me, in case I should happen to decline killing myself?"

The Regenerator rose from his chair, snatched his hat, gave her one look of extraordinary eloquence, and rushed out of the house without even pausing to close the door behind him.

CHAPTER VII.

Charles Chesterfield sets off for his Native Shades—Sir George Meddows shows himself superior to circumstances—He exhibits great ability in many ways.

On returning to Bruton-street to dine, Charles received from the servant who opened the door for him, a note containing these words:

"Dear Mr. Chesterfield,

"You must forgive my not bidding you farewell in person, as I do not feel well enough to leave my room. Accept my best wishes for your health, welfare, and happiness in all ways, and believe me,

"Very sincerely your friend,

"Clara Meddows."

This was a disappointment: Charles Chesterfield's attachment to Miss Meddows was very strong—his admiration of her unbounded—his esteem perfect—and his affection such as her unceasing kindness to him deserved. Though without the shadow of a suspicion as to the real importance of the service she had just rendered him, and the tremendous self-sacrifice it involved, his memory was deeply impressed by a hundred comparatively trifling proofs of her kindness, and it is no idle figure of speech to say that he would have died to serve her. Tears sprang to his eyes as he put her precious little note in his pocket-book, and he determined to take the liberty of answering it, when he could give her friendly heart the satisfaction of knowing that he was once more happy in the midst of his family, to which she had restored him as unbroken in fortune as unchanged in heart.

Mrs. Longuéville made her appearance at dinner in a dishabille which made her look a dozen years older than the startled Charles had ever conceived her to be; she appeared moreover exceedingly out of spirits, eating little, and speaking less. Sir George, on the contrary, was remarkably gay; when Charles announced his immediate departure, he rallied him

on being home-sick; but added that he was not altogether wrong in taking himself off at full speed, as it was a known fact that Noah's preparations for going into the ark, notwithstanding his being followed by so large and heterogeneous a train, were just nothing in comparison to the fuss and bustle of an English family of distinction preparing to go abroad. "There is Clara, you see, absolutely fallen sick of it; and Mrs. Longuéville, as pale as a ghost and as silent as the tomb from which she seems to have escaped, speaks not, and eats not, nor even

'Turning her round,
Sends some pudding away to be fried!'

In truth I am the only one of the family equal to the sort of thing. And be sure to tell your good father, Charles, that though this arrangement has been made chiefly for the sake of my health, I never was in better spirits in my life. I know the good old gentleman has a great regard for me, and he will like to hear it. Tell him too, Charles, with my kind regards, that rents are looking up in the south of Ireland, and I expect to increase my income there next year very considerably—and that's no bad news, either for him or for me."

Sir George here laid down his knife and fork, which, notwithstanding his lively talk, had been far from idle, and tearing off the back of a letter which he took from his pocket, drew forth a gold pencil-case, and wrote a few lines which he pushed towards Charles. The young man took it up, and read—"Not a word, remember, to any of them about the mortgage—at least, not till their hearing of Mrs. Sherbourne's affair becomes a matter of indifference to you." Charles coloured a little, but bowed his head in token of obedience, while Sir George again held out his hand to receive the confidential scrap. A hasty cup of coffee, ordered with that sort of *empressement* which testifies a desire of omitting no attention to the parting guest, was the last hospitality our hero received in Bruton-street; the next moment brought a cab for him to the door, and after receiving a vigorous shake of the hand, and great abundance of good wishes, he set off, certainly without a single feeling of regret, to seek once more the fields and the friends he had left so lightly.

His first sensations at finding himself actually *en route* for Maplebury were delightful, and he fell asleep, as the coach rolled on, amidst the most delicious anticipations imaginable. But

on waking the next morning, and being answered, when he inquired where they were, by the pronouncing of one or two familiar, neighbourly, names, he felt a qualm of doubt, and something like shame came over him as he remembered how very soon he should stand before Bessy, and Mr. Westbrook, and father, and mother, and Kit, and Susan, and all of them.

But we must leave him for a time,

"Thus balancing his fear and hope,"

while we turn back to the generous friend he had left in Bruton-street. Clara remained in her room during the whole of the evening which followed his departure. She looked forward to her interview with her father with a feeling of dread that rendered her quite incapable of sustaining conversation with him, or her aunt; but she spent the time in such a review of her own situation, and her own conduct and motives, as gave her something like the strength of despair in the first case, and all the consolation of humble, but steadfast self-approval in the second. Thus fortified, she very punctually kept her appointment on the following morning, and found, Sir George in a state of spirits hovering

between playful gaiety and tender fondness, already waiting to receive her.

Clara trembled:—not that she feared her father—fear was not a sentiment with which he had ever inspired her; but she felt that it was very dreadful to see the author of her being standing before her to await a most important sentence, which sentence she had placed herself under the necessity of giving against him.

"My sweet Clara! Why did we not see you last evening?" said the baronet, taking her hand, and leading her to a chair.

"I was not well, sir," she replied, but in a voice so husky as made her fear her own power of uttering what she wished to say.

"I hope, dear," said Sir George, playfully caressing her curls, "that you have not been tormenting yourself about this mighty matter of a loan that I mentioned to you? Positively, Clara, I shall laugh at you unmercifully, as the most moody little miser in existence, if you have. You are still a child, my Clara, in all matters of business, and know no more about my property, and the state of my affairs, than a baby. This, however, is quite as much my fault as yours; I have never thought of making you look sober and solemn for hours together,

by the rehearsal of my acres in this county, or my houses in another. You know the unfortunate fact that they are all entailed; a principle of duty (which, I thank Heaven, is the compass by which I always steer) rendered it imperative upon me to let you know this. But all minor details I have suffered, till now, to remain unexplained. Can you give me patient hearing, my queen, while I tell you a little what I can, and what I cannot do, with my property?"

"I should hear you not only patiently, but with much pleasure, father, through any details which might give me hope that your affairs were in a condition to justify the expectation of their being favourably adjusted. And even without such hope, you shall ever find a willing listener in me, whenever you shall feel an inclination to confide in me. But on the present occasion, I am compelled to tell you that no—"

"Stop, Clara! Before you answer me in such an accent as that," cried Sir George, suddenly interrupting her, "let me briefly tell you that the loan of the money which I have condescended to sue for, rather than command—which, as a father, I unquestionably have a right to do—will be attended with not the slightest risk whatever. You are such an ignorant little

puss, that I doubt if you ever knew that I have estates in Ireland. Are you aware of this, Clara?"

"No, sir," replied his unhappy daughter, sick at heart at the horrible necessity of listening thus to the degrading duplicity of her parent, and almost hoping that he was not aware how perfectly she knew him.

"I thought so. This is too bad, upon my soul, Clara, and I am positively ashamed of my share in such stultified ignorance of what very nearly concerns you. For though unhappily my Irish estates are entailed, as well as the rest, and therefore never can be yours, yet still the fact that I have an unlimited right to cut down timber, is very important to you, especially on occasion of this loan, as it enables me to give you the most unobjectionable security for the money I have desired you to let me have.—Though, faith, I believe you are the only daughter who would require it."

Clara had too often listened to her aunt's dissertations on the family property, to be in the slightest degree deceived by this flourish; and her courage rising with the indignation naturally aroused by a statement so utterly false, she replied, almost without faltering—"No security,

father, can enable me to bring forward money which I no longer possess. I have already sold stock to the amount of four thousand pounds sterling."

"Sold stock to the amount of four thousand pounds sterling?" reiterated Sir George, perfectly aghast, and suddenly turning almost as pale as his daughter. "And what, in Heaven's name, girl, have you done with it? I presume that you will not deny my right to ask this?"

"I have made it over to Charles Chesterfield," replied Clara, firmly, "in payment of the same amount lent by him to you."

The rage, indignation, and astonishment of Sir George at receiving this answer, seemed for awhile to deprive him of all power of utterance. He sat with his eyes fixed on the face of his daughter, as if he had not yet heard enough, and it was only upon her rising to leave the room that he recovered breath enough to utter the feelings with which he seemed bursting.

"Wretch! reptile! ungrateful viper!" he exclaimed, clenching his fists, and gnashing his teeth with a more genuine emotion of furious anger than she had ever seen him exhibit before. "Is it possible that the besotted rascal dared to approach you with such a statement

of the transaction between us as could induce you to commit this mad imprudence?"

"His statement, sir, was very simple, and had nothing in it that could in any way justify your anger. He related to me what you had done, as a proof of your great kindness to him; but, probably, as it was a business which he could not suppose would be particularly interesting to me, he would not have named it at all had it not been for the embarrassment which your injunction to secrecy laid him under. He has repeatedly, poor youth, come to me for advice, and did so upon this occasion. He could not endure the idea of meeting his family with the burden of this secret upon his mind. He could not suppose there was any treachery in relating the transaction to me."

"And could you hit upon no less affectionate advice, Miss Meddows, for this audacious boy, than bestowing nearly the whole of your fortune upon him?" demanded her sneering father.

"It was clear that I could in no way assist him so effectually, sir," replied Clara, calmly; "and knowing that if you had security to give

him, it might be transferred to me, I saw no important objection to the transaction."

"Idiot!" muttered Sir George, while the blood rushed back again to his very temples; "and what security, pray, did you think I gave him; which you so dutifully intended to demand of me for yourself?"

"I was doubtful, father, whether you had any to give him," replied Clara, gently, and turning her eyes away from him.

"And therefore you felt ready to move heaven and earth, in order to ruin yourself in time to prevent your assisting me. Daughter! I thank you."

"I felt ready to do all that was in my power to save your honour, father. It was better, in my estimation, that you should have my money in your hands, without security, than his."

Sir George now turned his head away from her. But there was at least as much of passionate indignation in the movement as of shame. "Leave me to myself," he said. "There is no stranger who passes my door, from whom I might not more reasonably hope for help in my difficulties than from you."

Poor Clara longed to ask if the money he

had received from Chesterfield might not go to liquidate the claim of Arthur Dalrymple, as the transaction was too recent to suppose that it had been already disposed of elsewhere; but she felt that, in his estimation, she had done nothing to purchase his confidence, and therefore she would not ask for it; but casting one unnoticed look of sorrow, and, it may be, pity, on her unworthy parent, obeyed his mandate, and left the room.

Sir George's disappointment was great. Had his demand upon his daughter been made upon any other ostensible cause, he would have been much less confident of success; being quite aware that Clara was sufficiently awakened to the embarrassed state of his affairs to make the surrender of her little fortune to him an act of weakness of which he could scarcely believe her capable. But the keeping up a friendly, unbroken intercourse with Dalrymple, he conceived to be an object important enough to furnish such a motive; and, resting his barbarous hopes on his conviction of her attachment to the man he had so grossly preyed upon, he felt little or no doubt of success.

But Sir George Meddows was of a nature not easily to be discomfited. Hard as the nether

mill-stone against every feeling which was not altogether personal, he cared not three straws what his noble-minded daughter thought of him, and would have cared as little about the opinion of Dalrymple (feeling a pretty strong assurance that he would never take any legal measures to molest him) had it not been that he still entertained hopes of seeing the attachment which he was strongly persuaded existed between him and Clara, terminate in a marriage. Often had he gaily exclaimed to Mrs. Longueville,

> " 'Tis a very fine thing to be father-in-law
> To a very magnificent three-tailed bashaw."

and oftener still had he calculated the probable amount of annual accommodation, one way or another, which he might reasonably hope for, did this greatly desired connexion take place. It therefore was still a matter of importance, in the way of speculation, to keep up appearances with his late ward; and when Clara left him, he continued to sit for a considerable time in deep meditation, one foot on the hob, and the other on the top bar of the grate, gently balancing his chair on its hinder legs, and asking counsel of his wits how he should manage to

settle amicably with Arthur, without spending a single farthing of his newly acquired four thousand pounds upon it.

There was something particularly favourable to speculation in the attitude in which he had placed himself; it was a sort of see-saw between safety and danger, in which he depended wholly upon his own skill, and the nice adjustment of the balance by which he sustained his position.

"A man must be an ass," thought he, "to give in, because a thing or two goes wrong with him. How many human beings are there, who placed as I am at this moment, would be sprawling on the floor in less time than it has taken me to remember that this position is dangerous. And how many more are there, earthed up on one side, and worried and hurried on another, who would forthwith turn all their thoughts to a pair of slugs, as the best, and perhaps the only means of relief. But may Mephistophiles himself com *in propriâ personâ* to drag me off to his own dominions, without the ceremony of even a box or smile, if I permit myself to be hooted from among the sons of men for such trifles. No! The puzzle has not been tangled yet which can master me. As to Dalrymple, a word will suf-

fice to put him off. . . . Egad, I know what I will say to him, and there shall be a little truth in it too, by way of variety. It may do good in another way too, for what I know. . . I have seen love and admiration fifty times over in Dalrymple's eyes, when fixed upon my peevish girl. But she has not coquetry enough to catch a fly in her ringlets, or a butterfly in her veil, and so the lad fancies himself free still. He has never had a jealous fit yet, and who knows but a little of that animating stimulant might make him speak out? We'll see. Next comes grim, starched-stiff, little Oglevy to be settled with. Confound him! He has no love to be played upon in his whole composition, except his love for the four aces, and the play with these is generally for him, not against him. This is the third time he has done me. Can it be all fair play? By Jupiter that doubt may be worth something. How glorious would it be could I hit upon any thing *louche* in his play! If one could but get the thing up, I know a dozen who would give a finger to prove it. And where should I be then? Magnificent idea! Feeling as young and as fit for Paris as ever, with four thousand clear in my pocket, that no man but myself could rob me

of. You must think, think, think, Sir George Meddows—and Sir George Meddows rarely does that, without coming at last to something worth having. *Nous verrons.*"

Sir George did think steadily and unremittingly for some time longer, and at first it was without changing his attitude; but by degrees he brought down first one of his handsome limbs and then the other; and then the two front legs of his chair were lodged soberly on the hearth rug. But the less frisky his external appearance became, the more the inward man seemed exhilarated. He rubbed his hands, chuckled, muttered two or three comical words to himself, and at length laughed aloud; then springing from his chair with the sportive agility of eighteen, he seized his hat, and immediately left the house with an elasticity of step that would not have disgraced five-and-thirty.

He took his way through Bond-street, across Piccadilly, and down St. James's-street. Had any body watched his countenance as he made this progress, it would have been thought to indicate that the gay spirits in which he had quitted his own door, had given way under the weight of painful meditations as he walked along. But it was not so. Sir George was

only preparing himself for a scene which he intended to perform on reaching his friend, Mr. Oglevy's dwelling, in St. James's-place; and the different evolutions which his features went through, were nothing more than rehearsals.

On arriving at his destination he had the gratification of learning that the gentleman he sought was at home, and he was immediately ushered into the small drawing-room where he was sitting, exactly as he wished to find him—that is to say, alone.

Mr. Oglevy was a short and very thin slight-made man, with a little firm-set mouth, a long thin hooked nose, light eyes, small and deeply sunk in his head, but looking, nevertheless, as if they could do something more than merely

"Guard their master 'gainst a post."

He appeared to be very earnestly engaged upon the leaves of an extremely neat miniature pocket-book, which, on the approach of his visiter, he rather hastily shut up, and returned to his pocket, drawing forward, at the same moment, a newspaper which lay on the table.

Sir George Meddows entered with a slow and dignified step, looking taller than usual; and though perfectly composed in his aspect

and address, having the air of a man whose every movement and word was produced *avec intention*, excepting to the keen observers who have the gift (not an enviable one, perhaps) of being able to trace amidst smiles of suavity, and under a noble, or at any rate a proud contour of physiognomy, the lines that mark the frequent action of passions and purposes degrading to the higher order of mortals, —excepting to such, Sir George Meddows had greatly the appearance of a gentleman. He looked too like a man of unflinching spirit, and on this occasion particularly wore an appearance of dauntless self-possession, which was strongly contrasted by the fidgety movements of the small individual he came to visit, whose appearance was in fact a contrast to that of the baronet in every respect.

"Oh!—It is you, is it, Sir George? Upon my word, I am exceedingly glad to see you," said Mr. Oglevy, rising and sitting down, and rising again. "I could not make out not hearing from you—could not understand it at all. It was not in the common way of doing business, Sir George, nothing at all like it, and that you must know as well as me. However, here you are at last, so of course it is all very well, and

I shall never mention the delay, you may depend upon it. I have got a memorandum, Sir George, and of course you have got one too?"

"I have various notes concerning the transaction to which you allude, Mr. Oglevy, and most assuredly I should have brought them forward before, had not my health been in such a state when I left town as to induce my physicians peremptorily to forbid my giving attention to any species of business whatever," said Sir George with dignified solemnity.

"Glad to see you about again. Look perfectly well, sir,—perfectly well—and that's a great comfort. But I suppose by your coming so early in the day that you have a good deal to do, and I should be loath to detain you, I'm sure; so we'll settle our business at once, if you please. There is certainly no occasion for any further delay."

"Mr. Oglevy," replied Sir George, with the air of a sovereign addressing an ambassador, to whom he contemplates the uttering a few hostile words before the audience is over; "Mr. Oglevy, you tell me that I look perfectly well, and in return, I am happy to tell you that I am so. Were I not, I should still, notwithstanding the sort of impatience you have

been pleased to express, take the liberty of postponing a discussion which would in no way suit a sick man. At present, however, I am perfectly ready to enter upon it."

These words were pronounced with so awful a knitting of the brows, that had Sir George been a sultan, and Mr. Oglevy his visier, he must have felt certain that the bowstring would be about his neck in a very few minutes. As it was, the little man's eyes positively winked as he looked up at his tall and stately visiter ; and though the long apprenticeship he had served to the mysteries of gambling had taught him that first and most needful law of the science, an eternal steadiness of face, which gave an appearance of firmness even to his diminutive *physique*, it was evident enough that he did not above half like the towering look and grandiose tone of the majestic baronet.

"A sick man ! Dear me, no, Sir George. Sick men never ought to think of doing business at all, and I beg you won't take it ill that I wrote to you, for I give you my word of honour as a gentleman that I knew nothing in the world about your illness. I can't say more if it was to the king, so I hope that it is all smooth be-

tween us, and there is nothing to prevent our coming to the business that brought you here and getting rid of it at once."

"Getting rid of it at once, Mr. Oglevy? Ay, sir, that is exactly the point I mean to come to," replied Sir George, half shutting up his eyes and looking at him with a very singular expression from beneath his handsome eyelashes. "As a man of honour and a gentleman, I pledge you my word that the only course you can pursue with safety to your person and your character, is at once and for ever to let this matter drop. Never shall any whisper concerning it be heard from me. However indignant I may have felt, sir, at the nature of the transaction to which I am thus painfully compelled to allude, I should hold myself dishonoured if, after assuming the office of a friend in giving you counsel, I were to be myself the means of making that known which, being so vitally important to you, should be for ever concealed. Mr. Oglevy, you are still master of your own destiny; and you owe me a debt of gratitude such as few men can claim from a fellow creature for having decided to permit your being so."

Sir George had been permitted to go on thus far without interruption, because Mr. Oglevy was literally too much astonished to answer him. At length, the poor little man, who was almost gasping for breath, found power to say,

"What, in the name of Heaven, Sir George Meddows, do you mean?"

"This is a paltry, a very paltry attempt, Mr. Oglevy. Perhaps after what has already passed, it ought not to surprise me; but I would fain have hoped to see you—wiser, sir."

"Do you mean to drive me mad, Sir George Meddows? Or do you only mean to amuse yourself? Pay me my money, sir, pay me my money, sir, this instant, down upon this table, either in notes, or cheque; or else, by all that is sacred among men of honour, I swear to expose you in every club throughout London and Paris. Do you hear me, sir?"

"Poor man!" cried Sir George, looking at him with an expression of gentle pity. "Poor man! This is very dreadful, and terrible will be the fate you must inevitably draw upon yourself, if you proceed in this tremendous course. Think better of it, Oglevy! I cannot but remember that though never intimate, we have

known each other long, and it will be with real pain that I shall feel myself compelled, if you force me to it, to blast your character for ever!"

"Blast my character? Who dares blast my character?" screamed the little man, in a voice the weakness of which was ludicrously contrasted with his vehemence.

"That dare I, unhappy man!" returned Sir George, with one of the tremendous frowns which he had practised *en route*. "Abandon now, and for ever, all claim upon me, for the sum so nefariously won when last we played together, or I hereby pledge myself to destroy your social existence in every place where men of honour congregate. You shall be pointed at as the juggling trickster, as the cheating gamester, as the scoundrel blacklegs caught in the fact. This, this, is the fate which awaits you, doomed and wretched man! Say! Speak! Will you brave it? Decide at once! I will waste no further time."

Little Mr. Oglevy turned as pale as death. Sir George rated him well, and a rush of triumphant blood dyed his own face with crimson. He hardly wished for words from

the trembling, agitated, death-like looking being before him. In the agony which every working feature of Oglevy betrayed, he not only read a receipt in full for all demands, but he even fancied that the guilt of which he had so boldly accused him must in some degree exist. Pushing his triumph, therefore, he said, "Your countenance, unhappy man, leaves nothing to be acknowledged by your lips. I understand your silence as a full compliance with my demand. Thank Heaven, that you have pushed your crime no further! Farewell! To my honour you may trust for the eternal oblivion of this fearful tale. Your name shall never pass my lips in connexion with this painful circumstance."

Having said these words, Sir George turned to leave the apartment with the same stately mien with which he had entered it.

"You are right! you are right!" said the feeble voice of Oglevy. "I cannot speak to you! But, — but, — you shall hear from me."

These last words were uttered in so low and sepulchral a tone as to be quite inaudible; and Sir George left the room and the house so enamoured of the skill with which he had

achieved this ticklish enterprise, that in the very pride and gladness of his heart he was tempted to exclaim, as he walked towards the lodging of Dalrymple,

> "Shine out, fair sun! and be to me a glass,
> That I may see my shadow as I pass."

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Dalrymple takes great pains to ascertain the Truth respecting a Fact in which he takes some interest but obtains Error instead, from the best possible authority —An Affair of Honour.

The baronet was again fortunate enough to find the person he sought; Dalrymple was at home in his apartments at the Albany; but he both coloured and started when he unexpectedly saw Sir George Meddows enter.

"Dear Arthur! How are you?" said the jovial baronet, holding out his hand with most affectionate cordiality. "You have been surprised at not hearing from me, I dare say; but coming is better that writing, is it not, my dear friend? Here I am to answer in full all you have written."

Mr. Dalrymple replied that he was glad to see him so perfectly recovered, and then asked him with a little hesitation, if the family had returned with him to town.

"Yes, my sister and Clara are both here, and you must come and see us Arthur. But I wish to Heaven that Clara had remained at Brighton, and that I had undertaken to make all the necessary preparations for our going abroad myself. You have no idea what a fool she has been making of herself about that lad Chesterfield that I brought to town with me last spring. Upon my soul I hardly know what to make of it."

Dalrymple again changed colour, but said not a word in reply.

"Not that I mean to insinuate that she has fallen in love with her rustic adorer, of course she would as soon think of owning the soft impeachment *àpropos* of a puppy-dog; but she feels '*interested*' for him, she says, and how d'ye think she chose in her wisdom to show this interest? Just guess, Dalrymple."

"Indeed, Sir George, it is totally out of my power to divine," replied the young man with haughty gravity.

"Piqued, for a 'thousand!" privately ejacu-

lated Sir George; "I thought I could use my weapons so as to hit him.—Then if you will not guess, I must tell you," said he aloud. "The boy Chesterfield, you must know, has got himself into a devilish foolish scrape with making love to that experienced little flirt, Mrs. Sherbourne; and being threatened with damages, actually became so terrified lest his old friend the parson of the parish should think him a lost sheep, that he sold out nearly all his little fortune (you remember the legacy story) in order to stop her mouth. The poor young fellow has no secrets with us, and when he told us of this foolish act, Clara said not a word, but quietly went the next morning to old Barton, the family broker, you know, and positively transferred stock to the same amount from her name into his. Did you ever hear of such a piece of mad-cap generosity? Is it not provoking?"

Sir George again waited for an answer, and after a moment's delay, Mr. Dalrymple replied, "It is a transaction, Sir George, which, however generous, must probably, I conceive, be considered by you as imprudent."

"Imprudent?—It is idiotic, Arthur. But of

course I could not suffer the girl to be ruined by her folly, and I immediately decided paying the sum myself. I have no doubt that if we will give them a little time, the Chesterfields will know the story from the foolish boy himself, and repay me the money honestly enough. I could not, however, suffer my poor Clara to run any risk, and my chief reason for communicating the business to you is, to account for the delay that I must beg you to grant me in settling our accounts. You know my regular habits of business, and will easily believe that the balance-sheet between us is made out with the greatest possible accuracy. All this, which of course between you and I, Arthur, is the most essential part of our settling, is already done. All I ask is a little indulgence about paying the balance. However, if this is in the least way inconvenient to you, I must of course alter my intention about poor Clara."

"It will not in the slightest degree be inconvenient to me," replied Dalrymple eagerly, but without adding another word.

Sir George, however, was perfectly satisfied, and changed the conversation by saying, "Do you know, Dalrymple, that I am ordered to go

abroad by my physicians on account of the state of my lungs? I cannot get rid of my devilish cough."

"No indeed, Sir George, I had not heard of it. I had understood you to say that you were quite recovered. I hope it will prove a false alarm, and that if you go, it will be merely for your pleasure."

"I suppose that I hope so too, Dalrymple. We all go on hoping, you know, to the very last. But at any rate I do not think it right to refuse obedience, and I intend, if possible, to get off by the end of next week. Mrs. Longuéville and Clara of course go with me, and we want to let the house in Bruton-street. I wish you could find me a tenant, Arthur?"

"I believe I shall want to find a tenant for my own house," replied Mr. Dalrymple with a languid smile.

"You persevere, then, in your fancy of visiting the Cossacks? Perhaps you are right to see all you can before you settle down into a married man and a senator; and as we are not to be in England for some time to come, I shall not mind you going so much. Russia still sounds like a distant country; but upon my soul in these days it signifies devilish little whether one

sets off to hunt at Melton, philosophise at Niagara, or go to a *soirée* at the drawing-room of the Emperor of all the Russias. But you must go through Paris, Dalrymple; one reason why that dear little capital is so adorable is, that it is on the high road to every other. You must promise to come and see us there."

"My movements are still very uncertain, Sir George, when I shall leave England; or whether I shall leave it at all this year is still dependent on circumstances. I have really decided nothing."

"Well, God bless you, my dear fellow, be you where you will! But at any rate you must give us as much of your time as you can while we remain here. Will you come and share our family dinner to-day? You must not refuse me, Dalrymple, upon my word you must not."

There was something more than decision in the tone with which Mr. Dalrymple declined this invitation. The accent seemed to say, not only that he did not mean to accept it, but that he felt there was something almost monstrous in the proposition.

Sir George perceived, to use his own phrase, that there was a screw loose somewhere; but

at that moment he was in too high spirits, and too well satisfied with the manner in which he had managed his own affairs; to be capable of feeling any very grave concern about any thing else, and he took his departure, gaily whistling an air from Don Juan.

When he had left the room, Dalrymple rose up and locked the door of it. His soul was in a state of tumult which he could not have borne that any human eye should witness. He had struggled hard to tear the image of Clara from his imagination and his heart; and though he was too deeply conscious that he had not succeeded to permit any self-delusion to beguile him into the belief that he was either indifferent or happy, he had still flattered himself that time was doing its silent work with him, and that the day might come when he should look back to the feelings which still tortured him with a mixture of satisfaction and self-approval, from remembering that he had not listened to passion instead of judgment, and had abstained from endeavouring to win as his wife a woman who had so often made him feel that she did not love him. But the statement he had just received from her father not only proved, beyond the possibility of doubt, her mad attachment to

one so every way her inferior, but also showed such a daring contempt of the ordinary decorum of youthful womanhood, as must startle and disgust the least fastidious. The pang produced by this was terrible. His early history was one that had taught him to cling with almost superstitious reverence to every thing that marked the dignified refinement of the better class of his country-women; and to find that the only one among them he had ever conceived it possible to love should thus have acted, seemed to turn every hope in life into a blank.

The first half-hour passed in these gloomy meditations was one of unmixed suffering; but in the next, a cheering hope arose that the statement might have been false, or at any rate not altogether true. His opinion of Sir George, though by no means so bad as he deserved, was such as to make him think it very possible he might falsify and disfigure facts, in order to excuse his want of punctuality in the settlement of his accounts. The idea once conceived, gained ground every moment: to endure an hour of unnecessary doubt upon such a subject was impossible; and unlocking his door, he hurried to his stables, himself assisted, to the utter astonishment of his groom, in sad-

dling his horse, and declining the servant's attendance, mounted without losing a moment, and set off at a brisk trot for the house of Mr. Barton, who was not only his broker, but an old and esteemed acquaintance.

He feared that some skill would be necessary in leading the old gentleman to speak on the subject on which he intended to cross-examine him; but perfectly resolved not to leave himself unsatisfied as to the truth or falsehood of this hateful story, he determined, if all other means failed, to let the old man so far into his confidence, as to make him feel that the information he sought was very important to him; and this he felt sure would be sufficient to render him communicative. It was evident from the cordiality with which Mr. Barton received him, that Dalrymple had not over-estimated the worthy broker's regard.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, my dear Mr. Arthur," he exclaimed, "and it would have grieved me sorely if I had been out of the way when it fell upon me; and that I should have been, as sure as fate, but for an accident that sent me home an hour before my usual time. I wonder, now, if I could coax you to dine with an old bachelor? I would give you as

fine a bottle of claret as ever you drank in your life. What say you to it?"

Had Dalrymple chosen to answer honestly, he would have said that he was quite ready to dine with him, provided he should give to his questions such an answer as he desired to hear; but that he could not venture to make the engagement unconditionally, because, if the answer were other than he wished, he should be no fit company for any man. Not exactly wishing to be thus frank, however, he thought the safer course was to decline the invitation, which he did with the assurance that he had by no means forgotten a very agreeable impromptu dinner of the same kind which he had enjoyed with him on his return from Belgium; adding, "We have never talked over old times together since that day, but I shall never forget all your friendly good-nature to me when I was greatly in want of it."

"If I had my will we should never be so long without meeting, I promise you, Mr. Arthur. And, by the way, you are just in good time to indulge me with a little gossip about an old friend of yours, and mine too. Do tell me, Mr. Arthur, if it is really the case that Miss Meddows, such a lovely noble-looking

creature as she is, means to give herself to a young fellow that I don't know much about, to be sure, but that I can't find out is in any way to be a fitting match for her?"

Here was the desired subject opened for him with sufficient explicitness, but how to go on with it he knew not. Already he began to feel his hopes and his courage fail, and perhaps, had the choice been left him, he would rather have escaped with the remnant of doubt that remained, than stay to endure the torture of having it removed. But such an escape was impossible; and nerving himself to the task, he answered, with tolerable steadiness,—

"I guess what you mean, Mr. Barton. But I did not know that any thing had occurred sufficiently decisive for it to be likely to reach you. How did you come to hear of this?"

"Why, the manner of it was queer enough, to be sure, and as we are all old acquaintances together, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't mention the circumstance to you, especially as the young lady never breathed a word about wishing to keep it secret. But you'll agree with me, I think, that the case is pretty clear, when I tell you that the lovely Clara came to

me the other day for the purpose of making a transfer of four thousand pounds from her name into that of Mr. Charles Chesterfield. There cannot be two ways of explaining that case there.—God bless my soul! You are not well, Mr. Arthur! What's the matter with you, my dear sir? Not taken ill, I hope, are you? I don't think I ever saw a man turn so pale in my life."

"It is nothing, sir—a slight spasm that I am sometimes subject to—but it is over," replied the miserable young man, struggling hard to master feelings of which he was heartily ashamed.

"Come, come, that's well—your colour is coming again now, but upon my life you frightened me; and though I don't want to frighten you in return, I can't but say that I think you ought to have a medical opinion about such spasms as these, Mr. Dalrymple; I do, indeed. Promise me now, that you will be a reasonable man, and just mention it to somebody. And whenever you do take advice, be sure to tell the doctor that when it comes on you turn as white as a corpse. I am quite sure that's an important symptom."

"I thank you, dear sir, for your kind interest about me; but I must get into the air now; that is the best remedy. God bless you, sir—farewell."

"Dear me! And so you must run away, must you, just as we were beginning to have a little chat? Well, well, I would not keep you for the world, if you think the air will do you good. But you'll take advice, Mr. Arthur, you'll promise me that?"

* * * *

While this scene was going on in Gower-street, Sir George Meddows was enjoying the anticipation of an evening spent at his favourite club with greater freedom, from the consciousness that he could not pay a bet if he lost it, than he had felt for some time. Though the light was waning, he determined to take one turn up and down St. James's-street, for in truth his spirits were in too volatile a state to make him relish the idea of sitting in his dull library for an hour or two before dressing-time.

As he once more crossed Piccadilly, for the purpose of reaching his favourite region, he perceived two gentlemen on the point of turn-

ing down St. James's-street before him. One of these he immediately recognised as the honourable Mr. Osterly, an old acquaintance, and one of high influence in the set which constituted the only portion of the earth's millions which Sir George considered as fitting to be styled "THE WORLD." He hastened his steps to overtake him, and just as he was half across the street, Mr. Osterly turned his head in such a manner as to render it apparently impossible that he should not see and know him. Sir George raised his hand to hail him, but at the same moment Mr. Osterly twisted himself and the friend who hung on his arm, round the corner of St. James's-street, and began walking away at a rapid pace along Piccadilly.

For a moment the gay baronet was startled, and half muttered an oath, followed by the words "a cut;" but in the next, he remembered how dark it was getting, and how very near-sighted almost every body of any fashion was growing; and then he thought again of his four thousand pounds, ready money, and of the style in which he meant to enjoy himself at the club, and so he whiled away the time as he intended, till he returned to dress for dinner; after which

ceremony carefully performed, he entered the library, now serving as a drawing-room, and astonished at least as much as he delighted his sister and daughter by the exuberant gaiety of his spirits.

Whenever and however Mrs. Longuéville and Sir George Meddows found themselves, there also might be found a pack of cards. With the pouring out of the coffee came as usual the words—"Shall we play a game of *écarté*, Amelia?" The brother and sister were thus employed, and Clara, as usual, was sitting at another table with a book, when the sound of a visiter's knock at the door almost startled them; for their return had not been announced, and they expected no one.

"It must be Arthur Dalrymple," said Sir George. No one answered him, but Mrs. Longuéville looked at Clara, while at the same moment the volume with which the young lady was occupied was so raised as to make this look of none effect. The visiter, however, was not Arthur Dalrymple. The door of the room being thrown open, the servant announced "Colonel Tibold," a name unknown, or nearly so, to both the ladies, but sufficiently familiar to Sir George to cause his rising up, and coming

forward with an extended hand to meet the person who bore it.

This courteous action, however, if seen, was not responded to; for the colonel stopped short at the distance of two paces from the *écarté* table, and said—"Sir George Meddows, may I have the honour of speaking a few words to you alone?"

The baronet immediately rose, and however sinister might have been the thoughts which this visit, and the manner of it, suggested, he betrayed no symptom of either surprise or annoyance. With a sort of stately courtesy, he requested Colonel Tibold to be seated while lights were placed in another room. He rang the bell as he spoke, and ordered the servant, who immediately answered it, to let him know when the dining-room should be ready. The interval before the man returned, though a short one, appeared very disagreeably long to all the party. The ladies, of course, were profoundly silent; and when Sir George asked the Colonel if he would choose to take tea, the answer, "I thank you, sir, no;" was pronounced in a tone that very effectually prevented any further attempts at conversation on the part of the master of the house.

At length the servant reappeared; Sir George immediately rose, Colonel Tibold followed the example, and the next moment they were shut up *tête-à-tête* in the dining-room.

"Now, sir," said Sir George, without seating himself, "let me request to know your pleasure."

"You will not be greatly surprised, I presume, Sir George Meddows, when I inform you that I come upon a mission from my friend Mr. Oglevy," replied the colonel. "Will you do me the honour, sir, of informing me whether your extraordinary visit to him this morning was intended as a jest? If so, it was a rude one, sir, to say the least of it, and Mr. Oglevy hopes, through me, to receive not only explanation, but apology."

As this speech was delivered with very deliberate slowness, it occupied sufficient time to allow Sir George all the meditation necessary for his reply. The interval was quite long enough to enable him to remember clearly the nervous temperament of the diminutive individual from whom this high-sounding embassy was sent; and promptly deciding not to abandon the bold project he had formed upon his knowledge of it, he replied, with a steady calm-

ness which permitted no feeling save a little disdain to appear,—

"I am not greatly surprised, Colonel Tibold, that the unfortunate gentleman, whom you call your friend, should prefer apology to explanation; neither will you be surprised, my good sir, when you have been put in possession of the truth, that *I* should prefer explanation to apology. The first, Colonel Tibold, I am perfectly ready to give; for the second, I am truly sorry to say there is not the shadow of a reason. Rather, infinitely rather, believe me, would I make the humblest apology ever uttered by a gentleman, than retain the painful and degrading impression of having made myself the companion of a man who could act as Mr. Oglevy has done. There is but one point of my own conduct which I can consider as in the least degree open to blame. I am afraid I ought, in the first instance, to have denounced the unfair play of which I accuse Mr. Oglevy to the gentlemen of the club, and in fact to the public; but a feeling of profound pity prevented my doing this. When we rose from the gaming-table, at which we had sat perfectly alone, and where I only remained long enough, after my suspicions

were awakened, to convince myself beyond the possibility of doubt that they were just, when we rose from that table I said enough to make the wretched man perfectly understand that he was discovered. As well as I can recollect, my words were—'Mr. Oglevy, let us never meet again. I am willing to sink the business of this night in eternal oblivion—but remember, that should I ever hear a whisper of any thing similar, my promise of secrecy will be cancelled, and every particular of this nefarious attempt made public.' Were it possible, Colonel Tibold, that *my* words could in the opinion of any man want confirmation, it might certainly be found in the fact that the wretched man crept off, without hinting at the payment of his nefarious winnings. Guess, then, my indignation and surprise on receiving this letter from him at Brighton, two days ago."

Sir George drew forth his pocket-book, and took thence a letter which he read aloud, as follows:

"Sir,

"I am sorry to be obliged to remind you of my claim upon you for three thousand eight hundred pounds, won by me at *piquet*, the last time I had the honour of meeting you at the

club. I flatter myself you will consider the length of time which I have suffered to elapse without reminding you of this debt, a proof that I have been unwilling to press the claim till driven to do so by your having apparently forgotten it.

"I am, Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"WILLIAM HENRY OGLEVY."

"Of course there was but one thing to be done, Colonel Tibold," continued Sir George, as he replaced the document in his pocket-book. "I immediately set off for town, and should have done so, I believe, had I been wandering in the vale of Cashmere, instead of on the Marine Parade, at Brighton. I went with all speed to the dwelling of this audacious man, and after placing before him, in sufficiently forcible language, I believe, the enormity of his conduct, left him with the assurance that if he ever dared, directly or indirectly, to hint at such a claim again, I would expose him throughout the world. This, sir, is the *explanation* of the affair between this wretched Mr. Oglevy and myself; and now, Colonel Tibold, tell me, as a gentleman and a man of honour, what sort of

formula, approaching an apology, is due from me?" Here Sir George ceased, looking up into the face of the gentleman opposite to him with an appearance of ingenuous frankness that he was conscious did him honour.

Colonel Tibold was evidently staggered by this "plain unvarnished tale," but after remaining silent for a minute or two, he said, "I am sorry to say, Sir George, that it is but too evident that there has been most atrocious conduct somewhere; and of course, on your part, it must be a matter of great regret that you have so long kept this affair secret. But I see not how, conformably to the duty which I have accepted of negotiator, I can avoid proceeding with my mission, and informing you that unless you immediately pay the sum demanded, with an acknowledgment that your late refusal to do so was uttered jestingly, Mr. Oglevy desires you will meet him at day-break to-morrow morning on a spot near the Gravel-pits, which I will have the honour of pointing out to any gentleman who shall agree to attend you. Mr. Oglevy will take a brace of pistols with him, if it pleases you to do the same, you may take your choice between them on the ground."

"To such an invitation as this, Colonel Tibold, I never return but one answer, which is, that I most willingly accept it—that I will immediately request the attendance of a friend, and take care to be punctually on the ground at the time appointed,"

"I shall not fail to report this reply, as frankly as it is given, Sir George," said the hostile ambassador, rising to take his leave. "I should be wrong to detain you longer, as you will have to seek a friend to attend you. When you have made the selection, have the kindness to give the gentleman this card. I shall, after seeing Mr. Oglevy, remain at home for the purpose of receiving him, and settling with him whatever remains to be arranged."

The two gentlemen then bowed very profoundly to each other, and parted.

For a few minutes after he found himself alone, Sir George Meddows remained standing before the waning fire of the dining-room, his eyes steadfastly fixed upon the pale cinders.

"Is it possible the rat-like little animal can be in earnest?" he murmured. "Is it possible he will pluck up manhood enough to meet me? I doubt it much. But for this, I care not a straw. The devil himself must take part

against me, which I do not greatly fear, or my hand will be somewhat the steadier of the two. If he does not bolt, it must be a chance, little short of a miracle, that saves his life. It will be no bad thing to secure his secrecy for ever."

Having no mind to be questioned concerning the business which had brought Colonel Tibold to call upon him, Sir George did not re-enter the library, but ringing for his servant, desired him to tell the ladies that he was gone out, and should probably be not at home till late.

"To the club again, I doubt not," said Mrs. Longuéville, after the servant had removed the tea-tray, and closed the door.

Clara expressively shook her head in token of the same suspicion, but said nothing.

"I wonder what that man came stalking in here for! He treated us very much as if we had been a couple of maid-servants. Did you ever hear of him before?" said Mrs Longuéville.

"I have heard the name," replied Clara, "but never saw him till this evening that I remember. It seemed to me that he was almost a stranger to my father also. Did it not appear so?"

"Evidently," rejoined Mrs. Longuéville. "I should not be greatly surprised to hear that he came with a message from some quarrelling

member of Crockford's, to invite Sir George to be his second in an exchange of shots. But it will be excessively silly of him, if he goes out with any of them. It often turns out a monstrous bore, now that people have taken it into their heads to make such a fuss about it."

"I trust that you are altogether wrong as to the nature of his errand," returned Clara, gravely.

"Very likely, my dear," rejoined Mrs. Longuéville, with a yawn. "How dreadfully dull it is, evening after evening, in this gloomy library, isn't it? I am positively sick with longing for the sight of Paris, and cannot conceive how I ever could mistake my own tastes and inclinations so completely as to leave it. My brother shall never make such a fool of me again, he may depend upon that. Nothing would ever have induced me to come to England, but the belief that he would be able to keep up a thoroughly good style of living, and I don't call it so at all—quite the contrary, being in London in the very midst of the season, almost, and never seeing a christian soul, or getting a single rubber. It is no comfort to me to be told that he cannot help it, and that he has been living too fast already. All that is nothing at all to

me, you know. Of course I'm very sorry for it, and all that, but the plain truth is, that I might have been living on at Paris without ever missing my card-table for a single evening, and with the pleasure of being constantly surrounded with friends !"

" Let us rejoice that your return to Paris is so near," replied Clara. " It is more profitable to fix your thoughts on the future which you do like, than on the present which you do not. I suppose you will be in Paris before this day week !"

" You are quite right there, my dear. Two days more ! and then, thank Heaven ! we shall be *en route.* It is no good to ask you to play cards, for I know by experience that you would not know for two minutes together what you were about. It is almost ten o'clock, Clara ; I think I will go to my own room, and just see that every thing is in progress for being ready."

* * * * * * * *

It will easily be supposed that it was not the custom in the Meddows family for the ladies to take any particular note of the exits and entrances of the master of it. At what hour Sir George returned home on the night of Colonel

Tibold's visit, they were wholly ignorant; nor were they at all aware that above an hour before their shutters were opened, or their curtains withdrawn on the following morning, he had gone out again.

Clara was ever at the breakfast table before her aunt or father; and on this day was beguiling the usual period of waiting by the perusal of the newspaper. Suddenly her attention was withdrawn from it by hearing a loud unmeasured knocking at the door, not followed, but accompanied by incessant ringing. So much was this clamour out of the common way, and so strange were the sounds which succeeded the opening of the house door, that she was irresistibly impelled to look forth into the hall in order to discover what it all might be.

It was a dreadful and appalling sight that met her eyes. As she opened the library door she beheld the body of her father borne in the arms of two men across the hall. His dress was profusely stained with blood, his face the colour of a corpse, and his features contracted into that indescribable expression which, trumpet-tongued in its grim silence, announces approaching death. Two gentlemen followed, both of whom were perfect strangers to her.

The End of Sir George

One of these exclaimed in a voice of professional authority,

"Let him be taken to some room where there is a sofa. I must attempt the extraction of the ball; but I cannot venture upon his being taken up stairs."

Clara, though horror-struck, lost no portion of her aching senses as she listened to these words; she heard them all distinctly, and they explained the fatal history at once. Her father had fought a duel, and had fallen.

It was to the library that the still bleeding body was borne, and in the shortest possible time the bewildered but still efficient Clara had a bed arranged there on which the dying man was laid. Then, and not till then, she left the room, while the surgeon who attended him home, and another whom she had instantly summoned, attempted the only means by which there was a possibility of saving life. Poor Clara! While this fearful experiment was making, she felt as she stood trembling to learn the result, that she was alone in the world. Nothing could give stronger proof of the total want of all real sympathy between herself and her aunt, than the fact that she never even thought of going to her during this dreadful interval, but stationed

at the open door of the dining-room, waited the result, unsupported by the presence of any human being.

Sir George did not die under the operation; he continued to breathe for an hour or two, but never spoke more; and before noon the two surgeons, the attendant friend, and all those who deemed themselves privileged to enter the house with inquiries, had disappeared, leaving the daughter and the sister of the slaughtered man in awful repose, to meditate on the tremendous event that had fallen upon them.

CHAPTER IX.

Showing that, in some cases, it is not wise to be better than our Neighbours.

It would be difficult to conceive a situation much more wretched than that of Clara when, the first stunning horror of this fearful catastrophe being over, her mind recovered its tone sufficiently to enable her to turn her thoughts upon herself and her own position. It is true that the agony of bereaved affection did not make any part of her suffering; it was impossible for her to have known her father, as she did know him, and retain any strong feeling of affection for him. But though this particular species of agony was spared her, she could

hardly be said to be the less miserable for it. There was something even in the absence of this natural sorrow, that was in itself terrible. She felt that it would have been a blessing to her, could she have wept the gentle tears of affection. Rarely has one so capable of loving and being loved, felt themselves so utterly friendless as poor Clara. So untoward had been her destiny, that her very virtues had actually been in a great degree the cause of this, for never, with the sole exception of Mr. Dalrymple, had she been thrown into near and intimate intercourse with any one capable of awakening the latent warmth of her noble heart. Poor Clara! She was not formed to love on like the mere well-dressed, pretty-mannered worldlings, who were the only intimates of her aunt; and now, in sorrow, in poverty, and distress, she knew not a single human being to whom she could turn with affection and trust, and say, "comfort, and help me!" There was one, indeed, and one only, to whom her pure proud spirit could have bowed with reverence and love, but he shunned her.

The waking on the morning following any terrible event is very dreadful. Mrs. Longuéville

and her niece met at their gloomy breakfast with mutual glances that seemed to say—

"Look I as pale as you?"

Not even the hard crust of selfishness, which seemed at all times to surround Mrs. Longueville like a shell, impenetrable as that of the tortoise, could prevent her feeling a creeping horror at the manner of her brother's death. Perhaps, too, with all her worldly indurated callousness, she had felt something nearer to affection for the wretched man who lay dead within a few feet of her, than it was possible for his daughter to have done. They had been brought up together—their miserable, paltry tastes and enjoyments were the same—their ambition had been bounded by the same glittering, narrow circle; and what had been enjoyment to the one, had been enjoyment to the other also. Mrs. Longueville, therefore, was as greatly shocked and shaken by the event, as it was possible she could be by any thing that did not threaten her own life, limb, income, or station in society. She looked old, ill, and gloomy; seemed disposed to moralize rather sentimentally (for her), and hinted that it was a misfortune to have too affectionate a temper, and a

heart too easily wrung by the misfortunes of others.

Clara looked as if the young blood were frozen in her veins; she semed to speak with difficulty, and heard but little of the half-fretful, half feeling, lamentations of her aunt. That her very soul was shaken by the horrible event, was greatly proved by her seeming to prefer remaining with Mrs. Longuéville, to retiring according to her invariable custom to her own sitting-room. Poor Clara had, for many reasons, been obliged to form for herself an existence which had almost made a hermit of her in the midst of London, and while appearing as the nominal mistress of a mansion there, which its master desired beyond all things else should be accounted gay. In doing this, her manner had been always gentle and quiet, but nevertheless so steadfast in the unvarying regularity with which she withdrew herself to her own occupations, that her aunt had long ceased to harass her with observations or reproaches on her solitary and unsocial habits. It seemed now as if she expected as usual to see Clara retire from the breakfast-room; and when she perceived that, instead of doing so, she drew her chair near the fire, and sat sadly and silently

gazing on it, she said,—"Well, thank God, my dear, that you are not going to shut yourself up again in your usual way. I must say, to be sure, that it would be both wicked and cruel if you did, and I in such a dreadful state, both in mind and body, as I am; and indeed, and indeed, Clara, we have enough to talk about, haven't we? I take it for granted, my dear, that you will now be aware that the best thing you can do will be to go back to Paris with me. We must put our incomes together, you know, and manage as cleverly as we can to make the best of it; and you ought to thank God, my poor girl, that you have got somebody belonging to you who does know how to manage your affairs."

Though in no very favourable state of mind for encountering the reproaches which she knew would follow the disclosure, Clara felt it to be absolutely necessary that she should no longer delay informing her aunt of her having reduced her five thousand to one; and she accordingly stated the fact, exactly as it had occurred, well aware that she should do no injury to her father's memory in the estimation of his sister, by openly stating the transaction between him and Charles Chesterfield. Mrs. Longuéville's indignation on hearing this probably did her

good, as it appeared immediately to restore the vigour and animation she had lost, and to give her once more the power of scolding heartily.

"Clara Meddows! it is impossible!" she exclaimed. "I will not believe you have been so utterly and entirely distracted! You cannot have done this mad act! Tell me, tell me at once, that you have only thought of it—that you have fancied it might be doing something very noble and fine, and all that sort of stuff, but, in the name of Heaven, do not tell me that you have really done it, for, upon my word and honour, I believe that another moment's doubt upon the subject would really drive me mad."

"Dismiss all doubt on the point from your mind then, dear aunt," Clara replied. "The thing is done, and I do assure you that I cannot regret it. Would it not have been too dreadful to have sent this poor lad down to the place where our ancestors have been born and buried for so many generations in honour and in reverence, with such a tale to tell? Robbed, fleeced, cheated out of the little fortune, the acquirement of which had caused such a jubilee among his friends, and that by Sir George Meddows himself. Aunt Longuéville, I could not have borne it; and the only comfort I have

at this terrible moment is from knowing that I have saved my unhappy father's name from the hateful disgrace which this frightful history would have heaped upon it."

"Madness! Perfect madness!" reiterated Mrs. Longuéville, "and as ineffectual as mad. And how, I pray you, most magnanimous young lady, do you intend to pay Mr. Chesterfield senior the thousand pounds with three years' interest, which unluckily happens to be due to him? And what is your *projet de finance*, if you please, relative to the liquidation of about a dozen other claims, all equally pressing, which I happen to know exist against the ghost of what was your poor father's estate? You know as well as I do, Miss Meddows, that from the hour my poor dear brother ceased to breathe, every acre of the Meddows' property became his nephew's—wretch that he is! saint, miser, and radical. I should like to know how much you expect he will contribute towards the liquidation of his uncle's debts? You know that we have all been at drawn daggers for years, and have no more right to expect he will contribute a shilling towards your maintenance than that he will nobly pay all the claims upon his too liberal-minded predecessor. How then,

in the name of Heaven, are you to exist, now that you have madly stripped yourself of your only resource?"

"As I can, aunt; but certainly not by asking the charity of my cousin," replied Clara. "But oh! how you grieve me by what you say of other debts. I guessed and feared that there might be many claims from tradesmen; but I have often hoped, before this horrible catastrophe, that my poor father might be induced to dispose of all his personal property during his lifetime for the purpose of paying every body. And this, aunt Longuéville, is what must be done now. This, if I have any power, is what shall be done."

"You know not what you are talking about, child," replied Mrs. Longuéville, scornfully; "and it would have been well if before you took upon yourself to arrange affairs of which you are profoundly ignorant, you had asked counsel of those who were somewhat better informed. The mad deed you have done will have no more effect in clearing your father's memory from the disgrace, if you choose to call it so, of having died in debt, than a drop of water in augmenting the ocean. The only excuse for your father, Clara, is that he was a man of

fashion; and happily for the higher classes of society this *is* an excuse which is never pleaded in vain to those whose opinions are of the most consequence. It is in this, foolish girl, that both you and I too must seek our consolation, and not in mad Quixotic efforts to pay what it is utterly impossible ever should be paid."

"Oh! do not say so, aunt," cried Clara, beseechingly; "do not say so to punish me for what you think an imprudent act. If I have rendered myself destitute, let me enjoy the only possible consolation left me. Let me believe that I have saved him, and you, and myself, from infamy!"

"What nonsense it is, Clara Meddows, to talk to me exactly as if I had the power of helping it, or of settling things one way or another according to my own will and pleasure," replied her aunt, petulantly. "It is really being *too* childish! I tell you, once for all, that your father was in every sense of the word a man of fashion, and as such it is your duty to consider him. I own I wish that tradesmen's bills were only the worst of it. These are trumpery claims that I do not believe any people of real distinction ever do care very

seriously about. But I wish he had not borrowed money of so many people of his own rank and station, because it is so likely that one may chance to meet them oftener than may be agreeable. The best remedy for that, however, is to go abroad directly—and this is what I shall certainly do, with as little delay as possible. But what is to become of you, child, Heaven only knows! I hope and trust you do not rest your dependence on me, for I give you my word of honour that it will be quite as much as I shall be able to do to support myself. Had you still your little income to join to mine, I would have done my very best to make a decent figure for you. But now I have no power whatever to help you, Clara Meddows; and I must say, that you do not deserve I should give myself any further concern about your destiny, let it be what it may."

"I will never trouble you about my own concerns," said Clara, firmly, "if you will only put me in the way of knowing what debts there are, without making inquiries that might lead to disappointment in the event that they unhappily should exceed the means of payment. There *must* be property, aunt Longuéville, which, if sold, would go far in the way of pay-

ment. If we cannot pay the whole, let whatever is left be divided fairly and honestly amongst all who have claims, and for God's sake let the tradespeople be the first paid!"

"For shame, Clara Meddows!" interrupted Mrs. Longuéville, indignantly. "Is that speaking like a person of common sense, and a gentlewoman? You actually make me tremble as I listen to you. I do believe in my heart, that if you had your way, you would like to advertise a dividend of so many shillings in the pound to all who had any claim upon the estate of the late Sir George Meddows, deceased! Clara! Clara! Before you entertain notions so detestably romantic, vulgar, and absurd, you should set yourself to think a little of what you owe to the honour of a respectable family. In my estimation it is a crime, yes, and a hateful crime, too, wantonly to disgrace a name which, however it may have been linked with acts of gay and fashionable imprudence, has never, thank Heaven! been stamped with vulgarity. But you are too obstinate and self-willed for me to have any control over you; all I can hope for now, is to sustain my own character, and that I fear can only be done by

separating myself from you entirely. This is a painful necessity, of course, but it is clear that I must make up my mind to it."

"It may, indeed, be necessary that we should separate, dear aunt; I greatly fear it is so," replied Clara, gently; "but this should only make us endeavour to render the last days we may ever pass together as mutually consolatory as possible. It shall be my study to do so, if you will only grant me all the information you possess respecting my poor father's personal property, and the claims existing against him. I suppose the furniture both of this house and the Grange has nothing to do with the entail? There is a great deal of plate too, and that of itself will go far, I trust, towards"—

"Upon my word, my dear, it is quite pitiable to hear you," said Mrs. Longuéville, interrupting her. "You seem to fancy yourself quite a woman of business, and you know no more what you are talking about than a baby. I am sure I hate to talk about the things, because the real truth is, that no good whatever can be done by it. They must arrange themselves, as the French say, and we should

be much better employed by sending for the dress-maker, and settling about our mourning."

"Why is it foolish and childish to talk about selling my father's plate, aunt?" persisted Clara. "Surely you would not wish it to be kept, while his debts are unpaid.

"Kept, indeed!" cried Mrs. Longuéville, impatiently, "What nonsense you do talk, Clara! As if your poor dear father, so frequently unlucky as he was at play, could have gone on keeping all that quantity of plate. I hate to talk to you at all about it, you are so exceedingly childish and silly; but if you will have the whole truth, do be quiet about the plate, child; he changed all his silver for plated goods, long and long ago, and so you might have guessed, if you had had a slight mixture of common sense in your composition."

Clara looked aghast, but received this most unexpected information in perfect silence.

"Upon my word, Clara, I see no reason why you should look so planet-struck at hearing this. I believe you would find, if you thought proper to enquire, that the world would vote your manœuvre about Mr. Charles Chesterfield a vast deal more blameable than your father's

changing his silver for plated goods; and moreover, you might chance to discover that a good many of his friends and acquaintance had done the same."

"Pray do not mistake me, ma'am!" said Clara, eagerly. "I dream not of blaming him for this—on the contrary, I think he was perfectly right. No conversion of property for the purpose of paying one's debts, can in my opinion be wrong. If I looked planet-struck, as you call it, it was only because it made me feel that our means of paying were less than I had hoped for."

"I wish to Heaven, Clara," replied Mrs. Longuéville fretfully, "that you would leave alone the debts, with which you have nothing on earth to do, and which really cannot signify a single straw, whether they are a little more or a little less. It is perfectly provoking to hear you going on ding-dong, ding-dong about a parcel of people that we don't care a farthing for, without even saying a single word as to how you intend to get out of the penniless state you have got into. Pray tell me, if you can, what it is that in your wisdom you intend to do with yourself?"

"My dear aunt," said Clara, with sudden

animation,—"Don't you think that the four thousand he borrowed from Charles Chesterfield must have been still in his possession? Alas! he had no time to dispose of it!"

"You don't mean it? You don't mean that he got the money so recently as to make it improbable that he should have parted with it?" returned Mrs. Longuéville, quickly. "Heaven grant you may be right Clara. In that case you will indeed be more lucky than you deserve, and be able to pay yourself again the sum which you so absurdly parted with. If this should prove to be the case, dear Clara, we may again set our horses together, and look forward to something like comfort. A very small apartment would do for us, you know, that is, as to the bed-rooms. I should not at all mind having only one between us, provided our salon was *comme il faut;* I have always been accustomed to make a respectable appearance, and I own that I think I owe it to myself to use every possible endeavour not to lose *caste* in the eyes of the world. And I can say just the same about our dinners, Clara; girls of your age never do care much about what they eat, you know, and I myself, so that I just have a nice little thing or two that I like, shall not in the

least mind running things as close as possible about our table; and that, I feel sure, will enable us to keep a smart-looking footman, which I must own, I think in justice to myself, I ought never to be without. In short, my dear, if you do but find this four thousand pounds in his poor dear pocket-book, I shall consider our troubles as over. I am sure the thought seems quite like inspiration."

Clara would gladly have avoided disturbing this happy state of mind, but she too had a notion that she owed something to herself, as well as her aunt; and, determined to leave no delusion that it was in her power to dispel, she said,—

"My dearest aunt! It is very, very uncertain whether this money was remaining in my poor father's hands, or not; but, if it was, do not believe that I shall consider myself as having any right to it. Oh, no!—the tradesmen, and —— O gracious Heaven!" she added, while a terrible recollection came across her—"Mr. Dalrymple, too! O aunt Longuéville! Would you not rather see me labouring for my bread, than let him remain unpaid? Oh! think what judgment such a mind as his must form of us!"

"Clara, you are enough to drive one wild!

Dalrymple, of all people in the world! Rolling in wealth as he is, and always appearing not to know how to spend his money,—you would actually be mad enough to think of paying him, instead of yourself! Let us talk no more about it, for goodness sake. Upon second thoughts, it appears to me very improbable that this money should still be unappropriated. Poor George never got money in as fast as he paid it out, so I recommend you to think no more of the existence of a sum which he would hardly have borrowed in the way he did, had he not been terribly pressed for it. No, no! There is no probability in it whatever."

"That is very true," replied Clara, with a very innocent air of conviction; "and surely it was much better that such claims should have been paid by himself than by us. And as for me, dear aunt, as it is most clearly evident that my own exertions must supply my wants, it is far better that I should tell you at once what I have decided upon, in order that you may not be harassed by any further discussion on the subject. My education has fortunately been such as to permit me to hope I may find a maintenance by giving lessons. I will not venture to engage myself as a governess, be-

cause I think my habits both of thought and action have been too independent to render me eligible for such a situation; but I may give lessons, and this it is my purpose to do—not in London indeed, but in some populous country-town."

"Exactly like you! exactly like what any one might expect from your eccentric high-flying absurdity: and this, I presume, is what you call doing your duty to yourself and your family?"

"Will you tell me, aunt Longuéville, what line of conduct you would think, under my present circumstances, that it would be better for me to pursue?" demanded Clara.

"You find it very easy to ask advice; I wish there were any chance of your feeling it equally easy to follow it," replied her aunt, tartly; "in that case there might still be hope for you. There is no denying, spite of all your peculiarities of dress, and stiffness of manner, that you are well-looking; and if you would immediately do what I would have you, there might still be a chance of your getting married, notwithstanding the mad act you have committed, of which, by the bye, there is no occasion to say any thing to any body. You have asked my

advice, Clara Meddows, and I am willing to give it, though, to tell you the honest truth, I do not believe you have common sense enough in your composition to profit by it. What I would recommend is, that you should immediately write to every family with whom you have ever been at all intimately acquainted, informing them of the terrible catastrophe which has taken place, avoiding, of course, all allusion to that most vulgar of all subjects, pecuniary embarrassments; and hinting with delicacy and tenderness at the desolate feelings which follow upon such a loss. You may mention also that it is my intention to return immediately to Paris, and then add that you regret this, as you would a thousand times prefer remaining in dear England a little longer, if you knew how to dispose of yourself. Take care to be affectionate and caressing in your language, and to every one you address say something kind and flattering about their dear happy home. If you will do this, and do it well, I have no doubt in the world but that you will get an invitation from somebody or other. Very likely you may get more than one, and in that case you must take care to make them dovetail in with advantage and

convenience. I have known innumerable marriages grow out of this sort of system: every fresh domicile is a fresh chance; not to mention that the same dresses, with a little care and attention, may be passed off, over and over again, for new. And now tell me, Clara Meddows, if you have honesty enough to speak the truth, do you not think this scheme is a better one, and rather more lady-like and respectable, than trotting about the town to give lessons?"

Clara was silent, nor did she even venture to raise her eyes.

"You are determined, I think, to prevent my regretting the loss of your society," resumed Mrs. Longuéville, looking at her with great indignation. "So you won't speak? You won't confess that I am right? Or is it, my most talented Miss Clara, that you do really and truly believe your own beggarly project to be the best? I must say that in common civility you are bound to answer me, let the answer be what it may!"

"But you will not think me either civil or wise, aunt Longuéville, if I differ from you. Believe me, it is very painful to me, on the eve of a separation that may be a very long one, to do or say any thing that may vex you; but

if you insist upon my speaking, I must say that, strange as it may appear to you, I do greatly prefer my own plan to yours."

"I cannot conceive how I could be such a fool," exclaimed Mrs. Longuéville, rising abruptly, and speaking with great vehemence. "I cannot guess how I could so utterly forget the thousand and one proofs you have heretofore given me of your obstinate self-will, as to imagine for a moment that I should ever find you reasonable. It is great folly, too, Clara, to suppose that we shall either of us be the better for passing this miserable morning together. I shall immediately send for the dressmaker, and when I have done with her, she shall come to you, unless, indeed, you should happen to take it into your head that it will be more proper and estimable to have no mourning at all."

With these words Mrs. Longuéville stalked out of the room, and Clara was left to meditate upon a past and a future, equally barren of satisfaction and of hope.

CHAPTER X.

A successful Guest—Continued Difference of Opinion between the Aunt and Niece, which is at last satisfactorily settled by both Ladies following their own inclinations.

Mrs. Longuéville had more reasons than one for thus hastily breaking up the *tête-à-tête*, in which she had certainly intended to derive something like relief from the dismal thoughts to which the late event had given rise. In the first place, she was very heartily and sincerely disgusted with every thing that Clara had said, and with every thing she had proposed to do; so that now it was a new relief to get away from her. Secondly, she was really beginning to get anxious about her mourning; a business which, as she continually repeated to herself

and her maid, was the most melancholy and heart-breaking in the world, but which was sure, nevertheless, of producing one good effect, namely, that of altogether turning her thoughts from the horrid images which filled them, to the considerably less excruciating occupation furnished by experiments and consultations as to what forms and fabrics amidst the comprehensive livery of woe would best accord with her person.

Both these reasons for her retreat were good, strong, and sufficient; yet there was another behind more good, more strong, and more sufficient then either of them. When Clara mentioned the secret date of the transaction which had placed four thousand pounds stirling in her late father's hands, Mrs. Longuéville immediately conceived the hope that all, or at least a part of this sum might still remain unappropriated, and by enabling Clara to repay herself, put it again in her power to organize the plan of their living together at Paris, in the agreeable manner she had proposed. But the intention which her niece had so decidedly expressed of disposing otherwise of this money, should it indeed be found, entirely changed Mrs. Longuéville's view of the case, and made

her feel that the discovery of such a treasure would be a torment rather than a consolation, were it to be thus wantonly appropriated.

This discouraging idea at first only acted upon her mind as a species of wet blanket, which she voluntarily applied to extinguish the hope she had conceived; for in her estimation it would have been greatly more vexatious to have found this money, and then have seen it so absurdly thrown away, than not to have found it all; and so well regulated was her mind, that the hope *was* extinguished, and she felt quite sure that the recovering such a sum from among the effects of her departed brother, was an idea monstrous and improbable.

But as she sat scolding Clara for her various absurdities, by some accident or other the recollection of their last dinner with Sir George came into her head. She remembered the remarkably high spirits he was in, and it instantly struck her, as she afterwards thought, by inspiration, that this light-hearted joyousness could only have been occasioned by the consciousness of having money in his pocket. The logic of this reasoning was irresistible. "If he lost it not at the gaming table that night, I shall find Master Charles Chesterfield's

legacy in his pocket-book!" thought she; and then it was that, unable to endure the vexatious society of Clara any longer, she rose, and left the room in the manner above described.

Cautious as she was acute, however, her first act was to mount the stairs to her own apartment, and despatch her maid with orders to seek the dress-maker, and, if possible, to bring her back with her. But no sooner was this intelligent official fairly off the premises, than Mrs. Longuéville descended gently and mournfully to the fatal room where her unhappy brother had breathed his last. The body had been removed, and laid upon his own bed, and the usual order and appearance of the room restored; nevertheless she would have been better pleased had her important errand led her into any other room.

Mrs. Longuéville, however, was much too sensible a woman to suffer any idle feelings of the kind to interfere with an enterprise which she knew to be right and proper; and having taken an efficient dose of red lavender, she felt herself wonderfully sustained, and went through the whole business in a most resolute and exemplary manner. No one knew so well as herself the whereabouts of all her departed brother's repositories: no time was therefore lost in vain

researches; but having applied the key of his writing table (thoughtfully looked for, and secured, before he had breathed his last), she at once opened the drawer in which she knew his pocket-book was wont to lie, and where, according to her expectation, it lay still.

The interval which elapsed between its greeting her eyes, and being clutched in her hand, was not great; and the very first touch of it made her heart leap. It was full. The pocket-books of other men might have been discovered to be equally distended, without producing on the minds of their confidential relatives the same delightful sensation as that now experienced by Mrs. Longuéville; for in many cases this distinction might have been accounted for in another manner, some gentlemen being in the habit of occasionally putting an unpaid bill or two into that general receptacle. But not so Sir George Meddows. His regular and unvarying habits of business led him constantly to deposit his unpaid bills in a very ample and commodious drawer which formed the capacious base of his writing-table. With this habit of his Mrs. Longuéville was perfectly familiar, and therefore hastily unclasped the precious pocket-book with the very firmest con-

viction that she should find it filled with bank-notes. Nor was she disappointed; a very rapid glance sufficed to show her that the sum she had hoped to find was there, and undiminished—but there was also a small scrap of paper besides; she recognised her brother's writing, and eagerly perused the following words —

"These notes, amounting to four thousand pounds, are the property of my daughter, Clara Meddows, being the sum she recently sold out of the funds, to answer a responsibility contracted by me to Charles Chesterfield. If I fall in the meeting I am about to keep with Mr. Oglevy, it is my will that she be immediately put in possession of this sum of four thousand pounds. I wish all other property to be disposed of for the payment of my just debts.

"(Signed) GEORGE MEDDOWS."

and dated the morning of the day on which he fell. Mrs. Longuéville, to do her justice, had not come to this examination with any intention whatever of robbing her niece by appropriating what she might chance to find there. Her pro-

ject was to save, if possible, any ready money that might be left from the engulfing whirlpool of debt into which her romantic niece seemed disposed to throw every thing she could find. Should enough be rescued in this manner to render the Paris scheme possible, she would have felt no scruple in concealing the fact till she had got Clara safely with her at Paris, beyond the reach of the claims which she well knew, if waited for, would not only strip her bare but break her heart beside, because it was utterly impossible she could satisfy them all. But it entered not into her calculations that she should find a will. She, too, had her habits of business as well as her departed brother; and though the testamentary document which she now held in her hand was not regularly witnessed, and so forth, she was quite aware that the suppression of it was a serious matter; and, therefore, trusting to the solemn impression likely to be made on the mind of her niece by the last words of her father, she did but wait to give her own necessary orders to the expected dress-maker, and then presented herself at the door of Clara's sitting-room with an aspect vastly more gentle than when she

had quitted her, and almost asked leave to come in, that she might speak to her upon a little business of importance.

"My dear Clara," she began, "I have something to communicate which, at the same time it will cause you strong emotion, will likewise, as I trust, relieve your mind from much that must now most painfully weigh upon it. Will you listen to me calmly? And, moreover, promise not to answer me too hastily."

"Most certainly I will," replied Clara, raising her eyes from the Bible which lay open before her, and fixing them on her aunt with a look that betokened both surprise and doubt.

"Well, then, my love, close your book, and hear me," said Mrs. Longuéville, with solemnity. "There is no need, my poor child," she continued, "that you should open your heart and express your inmost feelings to me, in order that I should understand your present state of mind—I know it but too well, my poor Clara—I know that you are at this moment totally unfit to look after your own concerns, or to enter into any of the painful examinations which your present melancholy circumstances render necessary. Knowing all this, dear Clara, it is of course my duty, as most surely it is my wish, to exert myself to the very utmost in order

to spare you, as much as possible, and at the same time to take care that nothing of importance should be neglected. With this view, my dear love, I have been examining the papers of your poor dear father, thinking it just possible that he might have left a will, and knowing that, before any thing was done, even in the matter of his funeral, it was our bounden duty to look for it. In this search, my dear girl, which, as you may well believe, it was exceedingly painful to me to make, I have succeeded beyond my hopes; for, not only have I found a will, Clara, but also the property for the disposal of which it was made. You were quite right, dear child, respecting the sum he had borrowed from Charles Chesterfield, and which you have made so tremendous a sacrifice to repay: whatever the object was for which my poor brother borrowed it, he felt, poor soul, that it was less important than providing in some degree for you. Here is his pocket-book, Clara. Here are notes to the amount of four thousand pounds, all untouched, and probably, exactly as he received them from the young man; and wrapped round them was this paper. Read it, my dear girl, and you will perceive that, though he did not, perhaps, make so much fuss about his fatherly fondness as many others,

there was no deficiency of that tender watchfulness which proves affection more than any caresses can do. Take the paper, Clara, read it, and, as in duty bound, take care to act in word and deed in conformity and obedience to the spirit of it."

Clara took the paper, and read it through the tears which very naturally flowed at finding that the thoughts of her unfortunate father had been occupied by her welfare during the last hours of his existence. But she read it in silence, and having finished the perusal, delivered it back into the hands of her aunt, and resting her arms upon the table, lay her head down upon them, and wept.

For a minute or two, Mrs. Longuéville seemed to think this very right and proper, and even uttered one or two little appropriate expletives, such as "poor dear!"—"quite natural!" "no wonder!" and the like. But ere very many of such phrases could have found time to make themselves heard, her *habits of business* made her anxious to get over all that kind of thing, and to find out what sort of use Clara intended to make of her recovered property, having still some disagreeable doubts upon her mind on the subject.

"Upon my word, my dear, I must say that neither you nor I are at liberty just now to give way to our feelings. It is very painful, Clara, very painful indeed—Heaven knows I feel it to be so!—but left as we are, totally dependant upon our own energies and strength of mind, it is absolutely necessary that we should struggle to overcome the weakness of our natures, and attend to business."

"I feel no weakness, madam," replied Clara, quietly raising her head from its recumbent position, and pushing back the dark ringlets from her forehead, which hung in beautiful disorder about her face. "I know that there must be much business to do, and I am prepared to do it,—and most grateful shall I be, if you will help me in it. I fear I am very ignorant, though I would willingly be useful, and unless you tell me what I ought to do, I doubt if I shall do anything rightly."

In saying this, Clara thought only of the sad routine of mournful ceremonies which ought immediately to be attended to, and concerning the details of which, she was painfully conscious she knew nothing. But Mrs. Longueville interpreted her words in a much larger sense, and felt extremely well pleased at finding that her niece at length seemed disposed to

give up that sort of self-willed pertinacity which had hitherto prevented her from obtaining such ascendancy over her as she believed to be absolutely necessary to her well-doing and success in life.

"My darling child! what is there that I would not do to help you?" replied Mrs. Longguéville, with a burst of new-born affection. "After all, Clara, you may depend upon it, that Providence knows what is best for us, and who shall say that your poor father has not been snatched from us on purpose, as it where, to bring us more closely together? It is a very merciful dispensation if it be so, Clara, and it is impossible we can be too thankful for it! Yes, my dear love, you do indeed want help, and help you shall have, Clara, from one who is willing to be a mother to you, if you will let her. Women always do so much better when they are left quite to themselves! I have no doubt in the world but that you and I shall be fifty times better friends than ever we were in our lives. No fault of my poor dear brother's! Heaven knows I don't mean to say that, the least in the world! No sister ever loved a brother more, that nobody can contradict. Poor fellow! How he used to love his little game at

écarté with me! didn't he, Clara? I certainly *have* the pleasure of knowing I was a good sister to him; no one can rob me of *that*—and it is a comfort, a very great comfort. But this is no reason why I should deny that it will be a pleasure and a pride to me, Clara, to become your friend and director. You have no idea how much may depend upon it. The fact is, my dear, and there is no need to mince the matter, that you are exceedingly handsome. It is exactly like having a fine hand at cards, my dear, if the best and the most is made of it, it may win you the game; but if you blunder, it is as likely as not that your adversary will get the odd trick, and leave you nothing to score but your age."

It was very evident that the notion of having Clara, and her beauty, and her little fortune, all under her own management, was producing an extremely powerful effect on the spirits of Mrs. Longuéville. Clara saw, and understood it perfectly; but, unwilling to bring her back to the state she had been in before, she made no direct reply to these visions for the future, but by gentle degrees so far fixed her attention upon the present, as to induce her to give many necessary orders, and to put in train all the idle

pageantry that precedes the consignment of dust to dust.

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The funeral over, and the two ladies with their scanty retinue clad in sable weeds after the most approved fashion, Mrs. Longueville informed her niece that she saw no advantage whatever in their remaining any longer in England.

"Bates has all necessary instructions about this house, Clara," said she; "you have written to old Watts at the Grange, who will put every thing in order there for a sale of the furniture, before the new baronet takes possession—he has allowed us three months, you know—and you have now nothing left to do, as far as I can see, that should prevent our setting off for Dover on Monday. I should think you must long as much as I do, to get off."

"My dear aunt," replied Clara, summoning all her courage for the contest for which she had been long preparing, "My dear aunt! are you aware that no day has passed, since the death of my father became known, without there having been a multitude of tradesmen's bills sent in?"

"Aware of it?—What an absurd question,

Clara!—To be sure I am aware of it. Do you think that after having promised to assist you through every thing, I should so fly from my word as not to take notice of all the tradesmen's bills that have been deposited on the library table? Fie, Clara, fie! You do not do me justice. Indeed, and indeed you do not!"

"How then can I think of moving away, aunt Longuéville? How can I turn my back on all these claimants without making some effort towards satisfying their just demands?"

"You do not mean to tell me, Clara Meddows, that you are so completely ignorant of every thing in the world as to fancy you have the power of paying your father's debts? Why, my dear, he perfectly well knew that it was quite impossible when he was alive, and had four thousand a-year to help him. How then are you to perform the miracle with just about four thousand shillings per annum? Pray Clara do not distract me with talking such nonsense. I shall be very sorry to quarrel with you, but upon my honour I shall lose all patience."

"I know that I have not the power of paying my father's debts, nor am I weak enough to

hope that it can be ever done," replied Clara; "but I cannot help thinking, aunt, that as we have no friend upon whom you think it proper to devolve the duty, I ought myself to remain in England till all the property we have at our disposal has been sold, and the amount divided in equal portions among the claimants."

"You know not what you are talking of, child," replied Mrs. Longuéville. And this time Mrs. Longuéville was right, for poor Clara was utterly ignorant of all the mysteries of proving, executing, administering, &c. &c., nor had her excellent aunt the least intention of throwing a light upon the subject; having in her own mind very considerable doubts whether the recovered money, upon which she reckoned as the *matériel* of her favourite Paris plan, would be adjudged the property of Clara, if the scrap of paper found with it were taken to Doctors-commons, and proved to be either a will, or no will. She had placed it in the hands of her niece, where she knew it would remain safe; and her project was to tell her before they set off, that this bit of paper, together with all other papers whatever (excepting private letters) ought to be sent to the lawyer her father had been accustomed to employ, requesting his

opinion on the best mode of settling the affairs, and giving him authority to receive the proceeds of the sale at the Grange, as well as any profit arising from the lease in Bruton-street, on the sale of the furniture there, if he decided it would be best that such a sale should take place. In short, she proposed to leave every thing in the lawyer's hands, save and except the four thousand pounds.

The packet containing the papers and instructions she talked of, would not be delivered till she and her niece had left London; and once in France, with these important nine points of the law in her favour which are derived, as the proverb saith, from possession, Mrs. Longueville had little doubt that Clara's four thousand pounds might be safely and profitably vested, before the various knotty questions likely to arise out of the testamentary scrap of paper could reach her knowledge. Great, therefore, was her disappointment when, in reply to her exclamation upon her ignorance, Clara gravely replied,—"I know that I am extremely ignorant of law, aunt Longueville, and it is for that very reason that I am quite determined not to leave England till I have received a professional opinion upon what can, and what

ought to be done. I have no scruple in taking possession of the notes my poor father left to replace the sum which I sold out of the funds in the manner he has stated, because this money having never been his property, his creditors can, I presume, have no claim to it; but I cannot endure the idea of taking refuge in a foreign country from the embarrassments that surround me here. I am determined to stay, and know the worst, let it be what it may."

Mrs. Longuéville looked at her with an expression that very truly expressed her feelings, for it was made up of contempt and anger. At the first moment she felt greatly disposed to punish what she considered as intolerable conceit, by telling her niece that she was altogether wrong in supposing her right to the money which had been found was unquestionable; but the prudent lady took wisdom in her wrath, and remembered that one word of the kind would be fully sufficient to deprive the firm of Longuéville and Meddows for ever and for ever of all and every profit and advantage to be derived from the said money. Whereupon she remained resolutely silent till the temptation of proving to her niece that she was a perfect fool, was conquered, and then she

said with a degree of scorn which relieved herself, without alarming Clara's honesty,—" May I take the liberty of enquiring, Miss Meddows, what it is that you propose to do with your *propre personne?*"

" Yes, aunt, I will tell you readily. I intend to request old Mrs. Chesterfield to receive me as her guest, till all that belonged to my father at the Grange has been disposed of. I know I can be of use in this, and whatever money is received, either from rent or otherwise, shall be faithfully remitted to Mr. Wells, the lawyer, towards the payment of the just debts my father's testamentary paper mentions."

" You mean to take out letters of ad——," began Mrs. Longuéville, but suddenly stopped herself, from a conviction that it would be more profitable for Clara to act without law, than with it; and believing that nobody would be likely to visit very severely any blunders so young a person might fall into, she at once determined to withdraw herself from all responsibility by hastening her own departure as much as possible. " What I mean is," she resumed, " that in case you finally decide to remain for a time in England, you must, when you join me, take out any letters which you think likely

to be useful to you. Not but what I shall be able to manage very well, I dare say, without your having any trouble. However, Clara, I hope you will not remain behind me long; and I would, meanwhile, advise you to let me take your money with me, that I may invest it advantageously for you in France, without losing any portion of the interest by unnecessary delay."

"If things go well, aunt, I shall hope ——, but about all this, I would rather take a little time. When shall you leave London, aunt Longuéville? I will not dismiss the servants till you are gone; but I shall retain no one but that steady woman we brought from Charlton, who will take charge of the house till it is let," said Clara.

"And is it your purpose, Miss Meddows, to remain in London with this establishment?" replied Mrs. Longuéville, inexpressibly provoked at the love of independence which her orphan niece assumed.

"Only till I have received the answer of Mrs. Chesterfield," she replied. "I have no doubt as to what that answer will be, but of course I cannot set off for Maplebury till I receive it."

"At any rate let no consideration for my convenience delay you for an hour," rejoined her aunt. "With your permission, I will send William instantly to the Dover-coach office, to secure places for myself and my maid by to-morrow-night's mail. Every hour's delay on my part will be equally useless and disagreeable."

"And I," said Clara, "will write to good Mrs. Chesterfield by that which departs to-night. Most certainly I have no wish to linger in London."

No further discussion whatever concerning their respective plans, took place between the aunt and niece. Mrs. Longuéville had much in her head and Clara much at her heart which was not ripe, in either case, for communication.

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Nothing could exceed the cordial yet respectful warmth of kindness with which Mrs. Chesterfield replied to Clara's proposal of taking up her abode with her, till her affair at the Grange could be put in order. "My good friend, Charles, has prepared a welcome for me," thought she; and she was more soothed and comforted by this idea, than she could have been by the

most splendid hospitality that could have been offered to her. It was now in truth a matter of deep rejoicing to her, that since her return to England, she had never been permitted to remain long enough in Gloucestershire to have made any acquaintance in the neighbourhood. She had greatly liked the residence, and would willingly have made it her only home. But it suited not Sir George's plans to keep up an establishment there; and his daughter now felt very thankful that she could return thither as a stranger, and be spared all the misery of reduplicated explanations concerning her situation and her plans.

Mrs. Longuéville executed her *projet de voyage* as promptly as she had conceived it; and Clara remained but two days after her, which she found sufficient for all she had to do. This *all* consisted in dismissing the servants; sending round to the tradespeople requesting them to send in their accounts to Mr. Wells; writing to Mr. Wells himself, informing him that she had so done; enclosing to him all the papers on business which had been found, together with the note which her father had written on leaving his house; and telling him that it was her inten-

tion to place herself with the family of Farmer Chesterfield, near the Grange, till the sale of all Sir George's personal property there was effected. One other letter she also wrote before leaving London, the contents of which will be given hereafter. This done, she took her place in a stage-coach, and without attendant or protection of any kind, arrived safely at Gloucester.

CHAPTER XI.

Singular Case of an obstinate old Lady's changing her Mind—Correspondence between Miss Clara Meddows and Mr. Charles Chesterfield.

WHILE these scenes were being acted in London, Charles Chesterfield was getting over the little difficulties, and enjoying the great delights, of his readmission to his home, with so much good-humour as to the first, and so much warm-heartedness as to the last, that he became dearer than ever to every individual of the humble circle that again constituted his world. It is true that Mr. Westbrook did work him a little upon some of Mr. Marchmont's sublime theories; and little Bessy took particular pleasure, on every occasion, to show that she considered herself as quite a child. All these,

however, were but masquerading miseries, and were speedily driven off the scene by real happiness.

It was in the midst of all this renovated joy, that the news arrived of Sir George Meddows's violent death; and though personal attachment towards him was probably not of a nature to make such news productive of acute anguish in any heart, the shock of such frightful tidings was felt by all; and when the orphan state of poor Clara was remembered, it was a true and genuine sorrow that was expressed by all. The venerable father of the family shook his head, and murmured his fears that the baronet would be found to have died considerably in debt. "I hope, I hope," he said, with some anxiety in his voice and manner, "that the poor dear young lady will be provided for."

"Thank God, father!" replied Charles, "I can undertake to answer for that. I know from her own authority that she was perfectly independent of Sir George, and that's a comfort, whether your notions about him are right or wrong. But surely, father, you do not mean to say that there is any doubt as to Sir George's having left enough to pay his debts?"

"I do mean to say it, Charles," replied the

old man, "for I know no harm that can be done by it now. So why should I make a secret of it any longer?"

"Why, father! Sir George told me himself, that he owed you a thousand pounds."

"Did he?" said the good man, smiling, but not very gaily; "I rather wonder at his telling you so, Charles, and I can't very well guess why he did it—but for all that, I am sorry to say that it is quite true."

"Nay, but there is no great need to be sorry about it, father, seeing that you have got such excellent security. He told me that he paid you nine per cent for it, and that it was secured upon his estate in Ireland."

"Upon his estate in the moon, Charles, he meant to say. He never had an acre in Ireland in his life, poor gentleman; and as to paying me interest, it was just as true to call it nine per cent as one; for from the hour I lent it to him, which is now three years ago, to the present moment, he has never paid me one single penny by way of interest or principal either. Nor do I ever expect to get back a farthing of it."

Something very like the shivering fit of an ague seized upon our hero, as he listened to this statement; and pretending to see somebody he

wished to speak to in the orchard, he suddenly broke away, and hastened to reach a spot where he could think and feel alone. It was then that, for the first time, he became aware of all he owed to the generous self-sacrifice of Clara; it was then that he comprehended her real motives or the interference which, by her own explanaion of it, appeared little more than an act of mere good nature, intended to spare him the embarrassment of having a painful avowal to make to his father. But now he saw the act such as it really was, and he trembled to think how likely it seemed that in the performance of it, she might have most deeply injured herself. At first he felt inclined, as an act of penance for the folly which had produced this misfortune, to relate to his father all the circumstances which led to it; but the task was a painful one, and as no immediate good seemed likely to arise from it, he returned to the house determined at least to postpone it till he should be able to ascertain what the actual circumstances of his benefactress really were, and to decide whether it was now become a duty on his part to insist upon at least sharing the loss which the dishonesty of her father alone would probably never have brought upon her had it

not been aided by his own weakness in so unadvisedly placing his money in the baronet's hands.

That he sincerely meditated upon such restitution did him the more honour, because the making it would have again hazarded all his future prospects of happiness. The favourite family project of making a clergyman of him had been resumed greatly to his own satisfaction; and though beyond this nothing had as yet been settled, he had begun to entertain very sanguine hopes that all he now most wished in the world—namely, a union with little Bessy, might, in the course of time, be accomplished. But this, of course, could only be anticipated in case he retained the power of maintaining her, which, notwithstanding all his recently enlarged ideas, he still thought his little fortune, added to a curacy, might enable him to do. Not indeed that even so, his path was quite clear before him. Bessy, it is true, had been already so far led to forget her childishness, and to remember that seventeen was really the age of rational womanhood, as to confess to him, just three days after his return, that were it not for his good mother, who had showed her a hundred times over that she would never per-

mit them to love each other except as cousins, that, were it not for this, she would own at once that she never would, nor never could, love any man but him. But even as he listened with a beating heart to this dear avowal, he felt that the clause included in it was not without weight. He too, and long before his journey to London, had perceived his mother's averseness to any nearer tie between his pretty playfellow and himself; but when the madness produced by that journey had passed away, he remembered, together with his mother's evident dislike to his attachment, a variety of cheering circumstances, which led him to believe that every other member of the family approved it. But upon anxiously consulting all looks and words which bore upon the subject after his return home, he began to fear that he had heretofore mistaken them, for he no longer perceived the same favouring symptoms.

The truth of the matter was, that notwithstanding Farmer Chesterfield's favourite dogma respecting the necessity of keeping women in their proper place, and never permitting them to talk of anything they did not understand, his wife Dorcas was a person of great importance in the family. They all loved her very

much, but they were all a little afraid of her too; for it was a fact of domestic notoriety among them, that despite all the good farmer's boastings concerning the immutable nature of masculine authority, nothing was ever done to which she pertinaciously objected, and few things, the achievement of which was possible, were left undone if she particularly desired their accomplishment.

Such being the generally recognised state of the case, and the old lady's decided dislike to any allusion to love-making between Charles and Bessy having, before the young man's departure, become equally notorious, every notion of the kind seemed by tacit but general consent to have been dropped. Christopher had left off all his little jokes about Bessy's numberless good wifely qualities; the docile Susan had schooled herself into almost forgetting that she had ever wished to see her niece become Mrs. Charles Chesterfield; and the old man himself, though he would have stoutly denied the fact, had most indisputably abandoned all thoughts of calling his pretty favourite "daughter," solely because he perceived that his good woman had set her mind upon something else.

The result of all this, though not the progress of it, was quite perceptible to the young lovers, and all they could do was to declare themselves determined, according to the established rule in all such cases, to hold steadily to their own wishes and intentions, trusting to time and perseverance for the frustrating all wishes and intentions that might be opposed to them. A line of conduct more frequently successful to the result wished for, than the happiness expected to arise from it.

In their case, however, there was unquestionably a very effective anchor for their hopes to rest upon, besides their pertinacity, in the recollection that, thanks to the good godmother, they were sufficiently independent to have their own way if they were determined upon it; and therefore it was, that the young man's resolution to refund a portion, at least, of what had been restored to him by Miss Meddows did him honour. Had he at this time been in the least degree conscious of what was going on in the mind of his mother, this determination of his would have had less of generous devotion in it. But neither he, nor anybody else, had the slightest notion how very completely this good lady had changed her mind. While listening to

all the histories which the anxious questionings of the family elicited respecting his London adventures, she began to be aware that her darling would have a better chance of happiness among his own people and in his father's house, than could be reasonably reckoned upon were he to take as a wife any body whatever, gentle or simple, out of that great good-for-nothing London, where every one, except Miss Clara Meddows, seemed to have disappointed him. Now the marrying him to Miss Clara Meddows had, somehow or other, never entered her head; and she therefore quietly made up her mind without saying anything particular about it, to bring things back again to the position they had been in before the news of the legacy reached them, and then to let said things take their chance; and if the two dear children really did love one another, to encourage them to speak out and say so. To an uninterested spectator there might have been some amusement in watching the various little manœuvres by which the good lady endeavoured to undo her own work; and truly, like other able artificers, she found it was by no means an easy job. There was not a single individual in the family who had not his, or her, particular reasons for be-

lieving that if they wished to live in peace and unity, they must carefully avoid hinting directly or indirectly the possibility of the event which it was now the first object of her life to bring about. But old Mrs. Chesterfield knew perfectly well that 'faint heart never won fair lady,' and she stoutly resolved that the fair little maid she intended to win should not be lost for want of her having courage enough to unsay all she had formerly said about marriages that were suitable, and marriages that were not.

Things were in this state at Maplebury farm, when the postman, a most rare visiter, stopped at the gate, and held up a letter, in token that the person whose face he saw peeping out of the window above the porch, should come down and take it, without his having the trouble of descending from his donkey. Bessy, to whose eyes this token was presented, ran down stairs, and out of the house-door with all speed, and was rewarded, by finding that she should have the pleasure of presenting a letter to Charles, for it was to him that the despatch was addressed.

As many curious glances have been directed, perhaps, to the outsides of letters as to their

contents; and as Bessy ran out into the orchard to seek her friend, her eyes held rather anxious communion with the fair characters in which the name of Charles Chesterfield was inscribed on that she carried. No ambassador, not even the Pope's nuncio, bears such outward and visible signs of being a messenger as does a morsel of paper, folded into a certain shape, and having a bit of wax upon it. Who so ignorant of all earthly things as not to know, on the very slightest glance, that this is a letter? Bessy held it up, as the postman had done, as soon as she was fairly within sight of him to whom it lawfully belonged, and was greeted by an exclamation, uttered in rather an animated tone "for me? Who can it be from?"

"From a fair lady, Charles, I am quite sure of that" replied the postman's deputy, presenting it—"what very beautiful writing it is! You shall give this direction to me, as a copy, when you have done with it."

"I am sure I have seen the hand before," said Charles, musingly, "but I cannot recollect where. And then he fell into that most remarkable practice, equally general and incomprehensible, of studying the outside of the

epistle, in order to guess vaguely concerning what he had both the right and power to learn perfectly, if he would only have been pleased to break the seal.

"Shall I leave you, Charles?" said Bessy, rather archly.

"Leave me? Yes, dearest, as soon as ever I wish to be without you."

"But as you do not yet know who that letter is from, Charles, how can you tell but you may wish me away when you open it?"

"If I do, Bessy, I will be sure to tell you so. But till I have ascertained the fact, you shall stay close to me, if you please, and just put your arm under mine, and now put your little finger in here under the paper on one side of the seal, and I will put mine in here, on the other side. Now then! tear away, and we shall discover the mystery together."

By the aid of this well-imagined arrangement the letter was speedily opened, and casting his eye on the signature, Charles exclaimed, with considerable emotion, "Miss Meddows!"

It was with no movement of jealousy, either real or affected, that Bessy now withdrew her arm, but simply and sincerely that he might, with-

out interruption, read what she knew must be interesting to him. "Poor young lady!" she murmured, as she drew herself away, "How dismal that black border looks!"

"Stay, Bessy, stay! Oh! listen to this letter. Hear what she writes about. Dear, dear, Miss Clara! This will be quite as much your business as mine, Bessy. It will be the business of us all. Hear what she says. It is very melancholy, yet it gives me pleasure too."

Though Bessy was unshawled, and there was nothing better than an early February sun to warm her, Charles placed her upon their dearly-loved turf-seat, and nestling closely to her side, read aloud the letter of Clara.

"Dear Charles Chesterfield,

"Before this reaches Maplebury, you will have heard of my poor father's untimely death; and will, I am quite sure, have felt a pang for me while thinking of all that must have followed it. I now write to request that you will apply to your good parents in my name, to ask if, without inconvenience, they could receive me for a few weeks at their house.

"They will easily understand that there must be many things to be done at the Grange, be-

fore my father's heir-at-law takes possession of it, which it would be right that I should superintend; but as I have given warning to all my father's London servants, I think that I should find it very dismal and lonely, were I to take up my abode at the Grange, with only the old bailiff and his wife to take care of me. If your father and mother could receive me, therefore, without inconvenience, I should be exceedingly obliged. At all events, you will write to me immediately. Should it suit Mrs. Chesterfield and your good father to comply with my request, I would set off the day after receiving your letter telling me so. My aunt, Mrs. Longuéville, leaves London to-morrow, for Paris; and of course I shall not wish to remain long in Bruton-street after her.

"Believe me, dear Charles Chesterfield,

"Very sincerely your friend,

"CLARA MEDDOWS."

"And now let us run to my mother this instant!" cried Charles; "only tell me first that you will love her, and be very, very good and kind to her. O Bessy! You do not know how good and kind she has been to me."

"Then I will love her, and wait upon her

like her slave and servant!" answered the warm-hearted girl, hardly conscious, perhaps, of the very ardent gratitude her accent expressed.

"Will you, dearest? Bless you for it!" and with these words he imprinted a rapid, but sufficiently ardent kiss on the bright cheek beside him, starting up almost at the same moment, and leaving Bessy no time to think of, or resent her offended dignity, so rapidly did he hurry her steps towards the house in search of his mother.

That estimable and very important lady was evidently much surprised at the purport of poor Clara's letter; not however that she left the anxious question of her son—"May I not write this instant, mother, and tell her that you will be delighted?" long unanswered, but though she replied promptly, he could not help thinking that she was at least as much astonished as pleased.

"Dear me, Charles! Yes, to be sure, my dear. But upon my word and honour you put me perfectly out of breath by being in such a hurry. And about the room! I don't know more than the child unborn what room she ought to have. Mercy upon me! Where is

Susan? Do run, Bessy, can't you? Of course we shall be happy to see her—of course—Charles, of course. But what in this mortal world could have put it into her head to come visiting here, who can guess? Not I, and that I won't scruple to confess. Lord have mercy upon me! I am sure, I always thought that it was best and fittest for me not to courtesy to her at church, the few times that she was down there, just because she might not have the trouble of returning it, so grand, and so proud did I think her—and now to see her, such an heiress as she is too, I suppose, offering to come down, just as if she was one's own blood relation. Let any reasonable person say if it is not enough to puzzle one, and put one out?"

"You don't remember, mother, how much better she must feel to know you all now, than before I went up to London. She was kindness itself to me, mother, and notwithstanding her rank and station, I may truly say that she treated me like a brother, and that being the case, don't you think she must feel almost as if she had a right to come amongst us like a friend, instead of a stranger? Indeed, indeed, mother, I have no words to tell how kind she was to me."

"I am sure, darling, if that is the case, I don't want her to feel like a stranger to any of us; and all that is in my power to do, shall be done to make her see and know that we are all properly grateful for her condescension and kindness. Nevertheless, Charles, there is no denying but what it is rather startling. But for mercy's sake, my dear boy, don't you keep me gossiping and argumenting here, when I can't for the life of me make up my mind even what room she's to be in—nor I shan't neither, till I have had a talk with Susan. Come along Bessy, child, I can't spare you neither just now—not that I want to put you off from talking about this, or any thing else, to Charles. It is all very right and natural that you should like to talk together. And yet, Lord help me! If this is not enough to put all sorts of odd thoughts into one's head again, I'll be whipped."

By the time this speech was finished, Mrs. Chesterfield and Bessy were out of sight, leaving Charles not much more than half contented at the manner in which his news had been received.

Between the arrival of Clara's letter and this first moment of solitude, there had been

no time for Charles to meditate upon the particular position in which he stood to her. He had only felt a general earnestness of wish and will, that her offered visit should be received with gratitude and joy by his whole race, as well as by himself, without having had leisure to reason distinctly upon her claims to both, and it was only when he saw, or fancied he saw, that his mother was not quite so much delighted as he wished her to be, that he recollected how great an effect a single sentence of truth from him might produce; and no sooner did this idea strike him, than he set off to wander through the fields in order to find his father. "He shall know all!" thought Charles. "It is likely enough that he will tell me I was a fool, but it is certain that he will feel for her as she deserves."

The young man had taken the right direction, and soon found his father, who, together with Christopher, was busily engaged in assisting a shepherd, his boy, and his dog, in an important examination of a flock of sheep, previous to an approaching fair.

"If you are not very particularly busy, father, I should be greatly obliged if you would just take a turn with me as far as Nettle-copse,

I have got something that I very much want to say to you," said Charles. "Do come at once, father, please. Will you?"

"Won't it keep for an hour or so, my boy?" replied the old gentleman, who really was very particularly busy.

"Not well, father, for I have got a letter to write about it, and I would not let this day's post go out without it for the world. Pray dear father, come directly."

"Well then, Kit, you must go on without me," replied the goodnatured old man; "you understand the business just as well as I do, that's one comfort—only I always like to be by, for custom's sake."

Arm in arm the father and son then strode away, and it was in a strain of nofeeble or lingering eloquence that the sometime poet recounted the facts he had to communicate. The effect which his narrative produced was on the whole fully equal to his expectation; though the displeasure expressed at his own share in it was greatly less than he looked for.

"Then he was, out and out, a rascal, Charles!" cried the old man, almost trembling with indignation. "Villain! How he coaxed me, and gulled me about your going up!—You call

yourself a fool, boy. What was your folly compared to mine? Tell me that, Charles. You had never heard his name mentioned but with respect; whereas I knew well enough, and to my cost too, that with all his old blood, and his graceful ways, grand and condescending-like in the same breath, I knew, if nobody else did, that he could pledge his word and break it, as easy as I can tie up this bit of string and untie it again. I was bewitched, Charles, to let you set off with him, for I might have guessed fast enough, if I had but given it a reasonable thought, that he would never have dreamed of such a thing at all, but in the wicked hope, some way or other, of turning it to his own account."

"But think, father, of the noble behaviour of his daughter!" replied the young man. "I am sure she has done enough to redeem the honour of the family, if her worthless father had done a thousand times more to destroy it."

"Tell me that part of it over again, Charles. I don't rightly understand what it was you said about her share in the business. How could it come into her head to give it back again, if her good-for-nothing father made a secret of it?"

"Because an accident made me let it out to her—Yet it was no accident," continued Charles, correcting himself—"I opened my heart to her, and told her what I should suffer from not having the power of telling you and Kit what I had been doing with my money. But I told her this, without having the least notion that the sum I had thus privately lent to Sir George was in any danger of being lost to me.—Only I could not bear the notion of coming home with a secret."

"And as soon as you told her, poor dear, she saw at once, I suppose, that it was as much lost, as if you had thrown it into the river Thames? Poor dear young lady! It must have been a grievous task for her—and I don't quite understand now, how she came to have the power of getting it back from him."

"She never did get it back from him, father," replied Charles. "As soon as I had told her of the loan, and of my trouble about having promised not to mention it to you, she desired me to leave her, saying she would see me again, naming the time at which she wished that I should come to her. Of course I obeyed her exactly; and at this second interview she in-

formed me that she had a fortune, independent of her father, which enabled her to repay me the money which she very frankly told me I ought never to have lent without your knowledge; but she uttered no single word which could lead me to understand that there was any danger of her losing the money she thus restored to me. And yet, mercy on me! I now recollect that at our first interview, when I confessed to her all that had passed between her father and me, and my great trouble in consequence of it, the poor dear young lady seemed as if she were taken suddenly ill. I well remember that she turned as palé as ashes, and told me to leave her, and come to her again at four o'clock on the day following, as if she were over-fatigued by the conversation. But it is easy enough to guess now, father, what it was that came into her head to make her turn so pale. Take my word for it, she felt certain at that minute, that Sir George would never pay me back one single shilling of my money."

"Ay, Charles, I'll take your word for it, and my own too. Poor dear girl! She has behaved like an angel, there is no doubt of that.

And pretty lucky you may think yourself, my young gentleman, that her means were as large as her heart."

"I wish to Heaven I was quite sure that it was so," replied Charles, shaking his head. "How do I know, father, what she may have yet left?"

"What do you mean, boy? She could not have acted as you say she has done, had not the fortune that she told you of, been really independent, as she said it was. It is plain that her worthless father could have had no power over it, or she could not have repaid you, however much she might have wished it. It was a blessed chance that put it safe beyond his reach, for if he had had any power to dabble with it, depend upon it he would not have left her worth a penny. We may thank God for her sake, dear young lady, as well as our own."

"That whatever fortune she had was independent of her father, is quite certain," replied the young man. "But I cannot help being very anxious about the amount of it. I cannot help fearing, father, that she has restored this money to me at the risk of wanting it herself; and this makes me very miserable."

"What has put that into your head, my dear boy?" demanded the old gentleman, smiling. "Though all you have told us about her, leads one to believe that she is a most kind-hearted, noble-spirited young lady, it is surely going a little too far to suppose that, in order to prevent your being ruined, she would consent to be ruined herself. That's quite nonsense, and not to be thought of, Charles. Of course she knew very well what she was about, and did neither more nor less than was just and proper."

"Well, father, I would far rather believe your notions on this point than my own. But now that I have confessed all about my own folly, I want you to read this letter, and I think your feeling about it will be just like mine."

The worthy farmer received Clara's open letter in his hand, looked at the delicate characters, shook his head, and then securing it between his elbow and his side, deliberately put on his spectacles. But despite this powerful aid, he had to turn and twist it about a good deal before he could master it. At length, however, he contrived to overcome all difficulties,

and read the contents from beginning to end without leaving out a single word, or uttering any observation till he came to the end of it.

"God bless my soul, Charles!" he then exclaimed, "Poor dear girl! Poor dear young lady!—All her servants sent away—not even her own waiting-woman kept? I don't like it, I don't like it at all, Charles. But it can't be. I won't believe it. Why did you put such nonsense into my head."

"You do not like her wanting a home, dear father, I can understand that. But I am very sure that you will like to receive her at your own. She will be welcome, father? Dear noble-hearted Clara! It will give you pleasure, father, to receive her, will it not? And about all the rest, we shall find out afterwards."

"Welcome? What do you think I am made of, boy, that you should put it as a question? Away with you into the house this minute! Answer her letter in your best of manners. Tell her that it will be an honour, and a pride, and a pleasure to us. Let me see your letter, Charles, when you have finished it. Be sure you let me see it before you send it off, and if I don't like it, upon my life I'll throw it into

the fire, and write to the dear young lady myself."

Perfectly satisfied that the feeling in this quarter was exactly what he wished, quite sure of having Bessy's pretty smiles and gentle kindness at command, with good hopes of his mother's taking the thing at last in a right point of view, and with no fears that any body else could take it in a wrong one, Charles hastened with right good will to obey his father's command, and speedily composed an epistle which the old man not only most highly approved, but undertook to put into the post with his own hands, having had his pony saddled expressly for the purpose, while the operation of writing it was still going on.

CHAPTER XII.

Miss Meddows arrives at Maplebury, and forms a Confidential Friendship with Farmer Chesterfield—He is despatched by her to London on a Delicate and Important Mission.

A REJOINDER from Miss Meddows to this letter from Charles, arrived at Maplebury as speedily as the post could bring it, cordially thanking the kind inhabitants for their promised welcome, and definitively fixing the next day but two for the arrival of their self-invited guest. The interval was past by the females of the Chesterfield family in a delightful little bustle of small preparation, more indicative of their earnest desire that the young lady should be comfortable and pleased, than of any power

of making their rustic residence resemble, in any respect, her accustomed home. Yet was the chamber at length fixed upon for Clara's sleeping-room, the very perfection of countrified neatness and freshness; and Bessy, in particular, wearied not of entering there for the purpose of altering her improvements, and improving her alterations, even to the very moment at which a post-chaise drove up to the garden-gate, and a tall young lady in the very deepest mourning stepped out of it, looking very pale, and without any attendant whatever.

Charles Chesterfield had for more than an hour been hovering outside this gate, in order to be ready to lead her through it; and assuredly it was a comfort to poor Clara to greet his friendly face looking anxiously towards her as she approached. Nor was his welcoming eye long the only one which greeted her. No sooner had the wheels of the post-chaise made themselves heard, than Farmer Chesterfield appeared within the porch, and in the next minute his neat and nicely-dressed dame stood beside him. Christopher was in the fields, Susan, if the truth must be told, in the kitchen; while Bessy, much too shy to bring herself forward, stood blushing, and peeping from behind the

window-curtain in the parlour, though her heart, kind little soul! was springing forward to welcome the lovely guest, and her bright eyes were dimmed by tears of youthful sympathy and tenderness.

To a person around whom fate and fortune appear to have drawn a veil so thick as that which now seemed to envelop Clara Meddows, no ordinary circumstances can appear of great importance. Not but she was fully awake to the cordial kindness of her reception—she felt it thankfully; but the strangeness and novelty of the home for which she had petitioned, its almost uncouth simplicity and unwonted stillness, produced but a slight impression; they made but a part of the new existence for which she was preparing herself, and occasioned her neither pain nor pleasure, and inspired neither hope nor fear.

At the very earliest opportunity, however, she entered with the most perfect unreserve upon the subject of her father's debts with old Chesterfield; confessing to him that she had every reason to fear he had died insolvent, stating that she was aware of his having himself a claim of one thousand pounds upon the personal property left, and expressing her earnest wish to

dispose of every thing available, in such a manner as to produce the largest dividend possible for the different claimants, both in town and country.

The old man kept his eyes very steadfastly fixed upon her as she spoke, and when she ceased, he said,—

"I will own to you, my dear young lady, that I am more sorry than surprised at what you tell me. We have been pretty well aware in this part of the country, for some time past, that your poor father was getting behind-hand; but however painful this may be to all the friends of the family, there is a great pleasure and consolation, Miss Meddows, in knowing that you are amply provided for. There is nobody who knows you at all, my good Miss Clara, but will rejoice heartily at this. For though there may have been extravagance, nobody can trace any of it to you."

Clara coloured slightly, bowed her head, and said, "You are very kind, sir."

This was by no means satisfactory. Farmer Chesterfield was quite determined to discover what her real circumstances were, and equally so to refuse his consent to her making restitution to Charles of the money he had so weakly

parted with, if it should appear that by doing so she had put herself to serious inconvenience. But notwithstanding the openness with which she spoke to him of the state in which her father's affairs were left, he already felt quite aware that he might not find her disposed to be equally communicative respecting her own. She resumed the conversation, however, in a tone of very friendly reliance upon both his good-will and power to serve her; ran over, with a greater *connoissance de choses* than could have been expected from her, the various property which would have to be brought to sale; and asked his counsel as to the best manner of discovering what persons had claim upon the proceeds, without raising fallacious hopes by the enquiry.

To all this he both listened and replied like the sagacious and faithful friend she expected to find in him; but when the subject seemed pretty well exhausted, and she proposed to join Bessy, whom she saw enjoying the sunshine in the orchard, he gently laid his sun-burnt hand upon her arm, and said, "Not yet, dear young lady,—do not run away from me quite yet, Were you consulting a younger man, Miss Clara, or one who had less known or less honoured your grandfather, it is likely enough that you

might find him contented with hearing exactly what you might be pleased to say, without troubling you with any questions at all. But I cannot do that, Miss Clara. And there are more reasons than one for my thinking it right and dutiful that I should go further. Trust me, Miss Meddows, you shall find a faithful servant in me, and loving, and attentive, though very humble friends in my family. But in return, I must have your confidence, young lady,—I mean in what concerns your money affairs, for without this, it is quite impossible I can be of any real service to you. You must excuse my freedom, therefore, if I bluntly ask at once, what the amount of your own independent fortune may be?"

"I see not, my good sir, how this can assist the business you have so kindly undertaken to assist me in," replied Clara, with some little restraint of manner; but suddenly stopping herself, and holding out both her hands to the grey-haired old man, who sat wistfully looking at her, she added with touching sadness,—"And yet, Mr. Chesterfield, I ought to thank and bless you for any questionings that show an interest in my concerns—for alas! I am very friendless!"

"No, no, not friendless, not friendless, Miss Clara. Humble folks may prove as firm friends as high ones," replied the kind-hearted old man, taking her offered hands, "provided, you know, that they are firmly trusted."

"Well then, my good friend, you shall be firmly trusted. The fortune I inherited under my uncle's will was five thousand pounds," she replied.

"Now then, Miss Meddows, you shall be trusted too; and I will confess to you, that my good boy Charles has had no secrets from me respecting his silly money transaction with your father, nor has he been less confidential concerning your most generous conduct with him. Had your fortune been thirty, or even twenty thousand pounds, my dear Miss Meddows, I might not have thought it my duty to interfere in order to undo an act, in the doing which the heart which imagined it was sure to take delight; but as the case stands, I neither can, nor will, permit that you should leave yourself so nearly destitute, in order to prevent my son from suffering from the deserved effects of his own folly. No, Miss Clara, no; this shall not be. Your four thousand pounds shall be honestly restored to you, nor need you fear that

Charles will ever feel the want of it as you must do. Would to God, my dear young lady!—forgive me for saying so,—but I would to God you were as well-sheltered and secure from trouble of every kind as my good boy is. He neither does, nor can, want for any thing; and now that we have got him safe back again among us, there is not, I'll be bound to say, any one member of the family who would care three straws whether he had lost his godmother's legacy or not, provided he had not got it by means of injuring you."

"That may be, and I am quite ready to believe it is so," replied Clara with grateful earnestness; "but your own feelings will help you to understand mine, when I declare, as I now do most solemnly, Mr. Chesterfield, that I would rather, infinitely rather, labour with my hands to obtain my daily bread, than suffer your son to be ———, than suffer your son to lose his fortune thus, by the untimely death of my father."

"Most surely, this is what the lawyers call an amicable suit, my dear young lady," replied old Chesterfield gaily; "and we must contrive to make it end to the satisfaction of all parties. But if you should happen to find that the

old man you have to deal with is rather obstinate, you must make up your mind to bear it this time, and remember to take a younger and more persuadable person for your adviser the next. And now, if you like it, we will walk out into our sunny orchard and look for Bessy Parkins, who will be the happiest little soul alive, if you will condescend to let her walk with you."

Mr. Chesterfield moved towards the door as he spoke, and had already laid his hand upon the lock, when Clara stopped him.

"We must not end this conversation without fully understanding each other, Mr. Chesterfield," said she. "You have given me sufficient proof that you well deserve my fullest confidence, and you shall have it. It will be easy for me to show you that the restitution I offered Charles has proved to be merely that of returning him the very identical moneys which he placed in the hands of my father. It is actually in my power to do this, having found in his pocket-book precisely the same amount. This, I confess, I was very far from anticipating when I refunded, from a simple feeling of justice, the sum he had sold out of the stocks, by a transfer into his name, of what stood in my own; but

now I might replace this money in the funds to morrow, if I thought proper to do so, for the bills to the amount are at this moment in my writing-desk. Of course you will perceive that this makes every thing even between your son Charles and me?"

It was certainly with very evident delight that the old man listened to this good news; and it was then only, that he gave the slightest indication of feeling any value whatever for his son Charles' legacy. Clara watched this contrast in his manner with a smile of genuine affection and esteem, and it was impossible that any two persons could conclude a conversation on that most ticklish of subjects, "the pecuniary," with a more perfectly satisfactory result on both sides.

"Now then we will set out and catch Mrs. Christopher's pretty niece," said Clara; "but she moves about in the sunshine like a butterfly, and it will require a quick movement to follow her."

Old Chesterfield, to use his own phrase, suffered no grass to grow under his feet, while keeping the promise given to his orphan guest, respecting her affairs at the Grange and its neighbourhood. He soon learnt from the bailiff (the only person who had ever acted as steward; for,

excepting his cook, Sir George had never indulged in expensive servants) that no rents were in arrears, and that on the small quantity of land immediately round the house, which had been kept in hand, as little stock of any kind remained to be disposed of, as it was well possible to believe. On the other hand, however, the good man had the satisfaction of reporting that there were but few and trifling claims from any of the country tradespeople, and that a sum greatly less than might reasonably be expected from the sale of the furniture would suffice to pay them all, provided a few sums borrowed upon large interest were not added to the account.

This was most welcome news to Clara. Of all the difficulties which surrounded her, the one which pressed the most painfully on her feelings was that she anticipated in paying the tradespeople, who had hazarded the fruits of their time and industry by trusting to the honour of her family, and furnished them with the means of daily existence from believing in their honesty. These claims, which, by some strange distortion of the moral sense, are generally considered as the last to be attended to, were in her estimation so greatly the first, that knowing such at least

could be honourably answered, relieved her mind from an intolerable weight, and enabled her to look forward with firmness to the destiny she was resolved to meet and to abide.

Believing herself without the slightest shadow of a doubt to be lawfully entitled to the notes found in her father's pocket-book, she of course believed also that she had a right to dispose of them according to her own will and pleasure; and no sooner did she discover that the butchers and brewers who had served the Grange were in a fair way to be satisfied, than she very complacently turned her thoughts to the execution of a project which had seized upon her very heart and soul the moment she had been made to understand that the money received from Charles Chesterfield had not been disposed of.

She had loved, passionately, devotedly loved, Arthur Dalrymple, but for several months she had been schooling herself into the persuasion that this love was not, nor ever had been, requited. To this, as she had repeatedly assured herself since the death of her father, she had as effectually sought to resign herself without a murmur either against fate or fortune, as to the sudden change of her position from being a

young lady of fashion to an humble dependent upon her own exertions for support. The success of this struggle, which, such as it was, seemed to satisfy herself, was doubtless as much owing to the high-toned pride that made so essential a part of her character as to the christian philosophy which it was her constant effort to acquire; but whatever might be the predominant feeling that had led her to the state of almost apathetic tranquillity in which she rejoiced, it was not of a nature that could enable her to endure the torture of believing that Dalrymple had been robbed by her father. Putting together all the circumstances which had reached her, the statement of her father respecting the account that was to be settled between them, his transaction with young Chesterfield, and his demand upon herself, she felt little doubt that money to a considerable amount was due to him; and that this terrible debt should be paid if every shilling she could command in the world could suffice to do it, she was resolved with an intensity of purpose that almost took away her breath as she meditated on the means of accomplishing it, from the eagerness with which she longed to put them in practice.

That she had still a thousand pounds in the funds, and that four times that amount reposed quietly in her writing-desk, were facts that greatly sustained her courage while meditating on the difficulties of her project. The first of these difficulties did not appear very formidable, as it consisted only in her ignorance of the debt; but there was another, which made her tremble from head to foot as she thought of it. How was she to address him on the subject? in her own person?—and so seem seeking for a renewal of the intercourse which it had been his will so decisively to end? NO—not for a reward considerably dearer to her than life. How then was she to set about it? Should she write to the London lawyer heretofore employed by her father, and now engaged in settling as he could between the claims of creditors and the proceeds of the property in Bruton-street? No; she rejected this, from feeling that it would not do to mix up her own transactions with those belonging wholly to the affairs of her father. She well knew that this payment to Dalrymple, furnished by her own means, could not be classed as one of these. She well knew that this reduction of her own independent means of existence was as completely a matter of self-indulgence,

as if she had taken a fancy in her poverty to indulge herself still with a carriage and horses, *coute qui coute.* In short, the execution of this business was not without its difficulty; and after several hours of very deep thinking devoted to it, she at length came to the conclusion, that if she could but obtain his consent, the best agent she could employ would be Farmer Chesterfield.

For this purpose, she again sought a private interview with the kind old man. Like every other member of the family, he would have joyfully undertaken any thing and every thing within his power to perform, that could either do her service or give her pleasure. Her gentle manner of submitting to the strangely new circumstances which surrounded her; her noble freedom from every species of affectation; her beauty; her perfect temper; and above all, perhaps, the gratitude which the confidential disclosures of the old man had caused them to feel for her generous care of Charles, had bound them to her, one and all, by ties of the strongest affection and esteem. Poor Clara felt this, and next to the sustaining influence produced by her resolution to clear all pecuniary arrears with Dalrymple, it afforded her the best con-

solation under the oppressive circumstances which beset her, which she was capable of receiving.

"And what is there, my very dear young lady, that I can do for you?" demanded Farmer Chesterfield, affectionately pressing her delicate hand between his palms of horn; "I think I may venture to promise that there is nothing which you can ask that I can refuse, only just provided that it is in my power to do it."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," replied Clara with a smile, "for what I am now going to ask is no trifling thing—but when I tell you, as I can most truly do, that whatever tranquillity of mind I may still hope for depends absolutely and altogether on your complying with the request I am about to make, I do not believe that you will shrink from it.—And yet Mr. Chesterfield," she added after sitting for a moment silent, as if meditating how she should begin, "I do very strongly suspect that you will think me wilful, and perhaps unwise in this most resolute purpose. Do me, however, the justice to believe that I must have very powerful and important reasons for being thus resolute. —There is a gentleman, Mr. Chesterfield, who placed unbounded confidence in my unhappy

father." Her voice faltered, and again for a moment she was silent. Had she looked in the face of her venerable friend she would have seen more of tenderness than he was able to express, for his eyes were full of tears, though he spoke not a word, nor felt in any way capable of uttering one.

"To this gentleman," she resumed, "a sum of money is owing, which it is my steadfast intention to pay. But there are some obstacles to my doing this, which I flatter myself it will be both in your power and will to remove. In the first place, I know not the exact amount of the debt; and in the next, I do not wish, myself, to have any visible agency in negotiating the payment of it. Under these circumstances, Mr. Chesterfield, I turn to you, feeling confident that if you can give up enough of your time to take a journey to London, in order to see this gentleman yourself, you will manage to settle the business for me, without letting my name appear in it at all."

"My dear Miss Clara," replied the old man, "I would be willing to do that, and a great deal more to serve you, if you will but teach me how it may be done. But I see not how this pay-

ment can be made from you to him without your name appearing in the transaction. Do you not perceive that this can hardly be, Miss Clara?"

"No, Mr. Chesterfield, no. It may be, and very easily; provided you will have the goodness to adopt the plan I would suggest. You have already, you know, undertaken most kindly to make all payments for me here. Let this transaction be placed on the same footing, and there will be no need whatever that any mention should be made of my name."

"Quite right, quite right, Miss Clara; now I understand you," returned the good man, apparently much pleased. "I fancied—I was afraid that your proposal meant a—But I now understand it all perfectly; the debt to this gentleman, as soon as I have ascertained its amount, is to be paid from the proceeds of the sale which we hope to effect next month. That is your intention, is it not, my dear young lady?"

"Not so, Mr. Chesterfield," returned Clara, colouring violently. "This debt, let its amount be what it may, is to be paid solely from my own funds. I know it to be considerable, to

the amount of —— but this matters not. If you undertake the commission at all, it must be with the understanding that whatever be the amount, provided it exceed not five thousand pounds, you make the gentleman of whom I speak understand that it will be immediately paid by you from property belonging to the Meddows family, placed in your hands for the payment of Sir George's debts."

The worthy farmer looked very steadfastly in the face of the young lady as she spoke, which occasioned her to fix her eyes on the floor; thereby enabling him to persevere in the scrutiny he was making without reserve or scruple. The consequence of this was that before the interview ended, old Mr. Chesterfield became very perfectly persuaded that his beautiful guest had some inexplicable feelings respecting the gentleman in question, which in no way resembled any that were excited by other creditors. But the old man was a wise old man, and uttered no syllable that could make her suspect she had betrayed herself; on the contrary, she listened with very particular satisfaction to the tone of voice in which he replied,

"Very good, I quite understand you now.

And what is the gentleman's name, Miss Clara? And whereabouts in London does he live?"

This was exactly the part of the conversation which she had the most dreaded; but, reassured by the tone in which the question was asked, she replied, with very tolerable composure, "Dalrymple is the name. I will give you, of course, his full address as soon as you tell me that you are ready to set off—and I hope, I hope, my dear kind friend, that this will be very soon. You can hardly imagine how greatly happier I shall be when this is done."

"To-morrow, if you like it, my dear Miss Clara," was the prompt reply. "Christopher can do without me for the next week or so perfectly well. Let it be settled at once, if you please, that I shall go to-morrow. The jockey-cart will take me over to Gloucester in time for the evening coach, and there are plenty of hours left to-day for you to write any letters you may wish me to take for you."

"There will be no letters, my good Mr. Chesterfield," she replied eagerly, while a bright blush again mounted to her eyes. "Most carefully must you remember that my name must

on no account be mentioned. And, therefore, of course you know I cannot wish to write."

"Never fear, never fear! I shall not forget that. But you might have had other letters to write, you know, Miss Clara."

"I have not a single correspondent in London," replied the isolated Clara, with a smile and a sigh. "So there is no danger that my letters should delay you. But is it not likely that your good wife may think this journey somewhat over sudden?"

"Not a bit, Miss Clara. I have my own principles, my dear Miss Meddows, about the proper place of women, saving your presence, and no female in my family ever thinks of interfering with my going and coming. I take particular good care to be master at home both in word and deed."

Luckily for the farmer's boasted independence, and for the gratification of Clara's impatience also, Mrs. Chesterfield made no objection whatever to his taking this trip to London; but on the contrary, exerted herself so effectually to assist the project, that an admirably packed little portmanteau was ready for him at least three hours before the jockey-cart came to the door.

"Will you go with me, Charles?" said the old man jestingly, as he saw the vehicle appear. "Perhaps you would like to see some of your London friends?"

"No thank'ye, father!" was the reply, uttered with a degree of fervour which resulted from the united ideas of Mrs. Sherbourne and little Bessy; "No—I think I'd rather stay at Maplebury just at present."

CHAPTER XIII.

An Embassy, and its Result.

Miss Meddows gave her worthy messenger, as she had promised, a full direction to Mr. Dalrymple; so that, albeit but little accustomed to find his way about London, the good farmer contrived to convey himself very safely to the chambers occupied by that gentleman in the Albany. Having told the servant who opened the door for him that he had come from the country in order to speak to Mr. Dalrymple on business, the intelligent functionary so delivered the message as to procure an immediate order for his admission. Nevertheless, Dalrymple was at the very busiest moment of his preparations for the distant journey upon which he was going to start, and for which he had

been preparing for several weeks past, by so complete and well-ordered an arrangement of all his English concerns, as proved that he did not contemplate a very speedy return. But, notwithstanding the engrossing nature of his occupation, which was that of arranging papers, he would not dismiss unseen "the respectable-looking country-farmer like" whom his servant described, and Mr. Chesterfield was accordingly ushered into the same room in which his son Charles had breakfasted with such extreme satisfaction about ten months before.

Dalrymple had expected to see some rustic Herefordshire neighbour come to consult "the squire" about some puzzling matter of business; but perceiving in the visiter so accurately described by his servant a perfect stranger, he desired him to be seated, with probably less feeling of impatience than might have been produced by an intruder of higher pretensions.

"I am afraid, sir, that I interrupt you," said Farmer Chesterfield, "but I came upon a sort of business that most people consider as a good apology for intrusion. I come to pay you money, Mr. Dalrymple."

"May I ask you to favour me with your name, sir?" replied the young man.

"My name is Chesterfield. Chesterfield of Maplebury Farm, Charlton, Gloucestershire," was the stout yeoman's answer.

Not even Clara Meddows herself, when the good old man had so anxiously watched her while giving her instructions respecting the business he was come to execute, not even the delicate cheek of Clara then showed a blush of more evident emotion than did Arthur Dalrymple as he heard this name.

"Oh! oh!" thought the rustic squire of dames, "the young gentleman knows, I will be sworn for it, who is the guest of old Chesterfield, of Maplebury Farm, Charlton, Gloucestershire. God grant a blessing on my embassy! They'd make the handsomest pair in Christendom."

"I think there must be some mistake, sir," said Mr. Dalrymple, rather haughtily. "Neither yourself, nor any person of your family, can, I am very sure, have any money to pay, or any business to transact with me, whatever. Permit me to say that I am particularly occupied at this moment."

"You would be right, as I believe, sir" returned Chesterfield, not noticing the offensive tone, "did I speak for myself, or, as you say, for any of my family, we not being likely to

have the honour of having any business with a gentleman who, as far as I know and believe, is altogether a stranger to our county. But it is not on account of me or mine that I am come, but from a young lady who is so condescending—that is, I don't mean I come from the young lady herself, but it is about the affairs of her late unfortunate father, that she has been pleased to put altogether into my hands. Miss Clara Meddows is the young lady that I believe I mentioned was staying in my house, and it is on account of money owing to you from her late father, that I come to visit you, Mr. Dalrymple. And now I presume, sir, you will be able to understand me."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Dalrymple, rising hastily, "but I still believe there is some mistake. I considered every thing between the late Sir George Meddows and myself as cancelled by his death; and even were it otherwise, I must beg to repeat that I am at present very particularly engaged, and would much prefer your applying to my solicitor, whose address I will immediately give you. This is a subject upon which I certainly shall not enter either with you or any of your family."

"Ungrateful puppy!" would have escaped

the lips of Mr. Chesterfield, had he at that moment thought aloud. He had perceived with astonishment and dismay the vehement and by no means agreeable effect which the name of Meddows had produced; and he now fancied that he read a feeling little short of hatred in the frowning brow and flashing eye of his companion. "My mission was to you, sir, and not to your lawyer," replied the offended old man: "if the work in hand is to be settled by lawyers, there had better be one of each side. I am no lawyer, Mr. Dalrymple, I am only a very faithful friend of the dear—of the whole Meddows family."

"The whole Meddows family," returned Mr. Dalrymple, with something slightly approaching a sneer, "is likely, if report says true, to be speedily merged in your own Mr. Chesterfield. But be this as it may, I have really no time to spare, and must therefore wish you good morning."

"What in the name of all that's wonderful could ever have made her care for such a detestable puppy, or trouble her dear generous spirit as to whether he was paid or not?" muttered old Chesterfield, between his teeth, as he sternly and steadily looked in the haughty

countenance of the indignant Dalrymple, who saw in this mission nothing but an insolent and unfeeling display, on the part of Clara, of the wealth and independence of the low-born race with whom her degrading attachment was about to connect her.

"I will not deceive you, sir," said the old man, at length speaking loud enough to be heard. "There are reasons, which I am not bound to give, which will prevent any lawyers ever being employed in this business; and your pride must either submit itself to stating the amount of the debt, and receiving payment from me, or most probably you will find yourself obliged to abandon your claim altogether. Now, sir, will you be pleased to give me a civil answer, and let me know to what amount your claim goes?"

"My claim, sir? Who dares say I ever made a claim? Who dares dream that I ever thought of it?" replied the chafed and unreasonable Dalrymple. "I can have nothing to do, it is quite impossible that either now or ever I should have any business to transact, either by my lawyer or otherwise, with you or any member of your family. Whatever may have passed between myself and the late Sir

George Meddows, may surely be considered as sacred from your interference, and I cannot but consider it as a very unwarrantable impertinence, that you should have thought yourself called upon to examine into it. Once more, sir, permit me to wish you good morning, and be pleased to assure the lady, whom I presume you have the honour of calling daughter, that she need be under no apprehension of ever being troubled by any application from me."

Farmer Chesterfield stared at him as he made this harangue with the most unfeigned astonishment, and the incomprehensibility of it appeared in some degree to lessen his indignation; for he began to suspect that the young gentleman, from some cause or other which he could not comprehend, neither understood who he was, nor what he had been talking about. It was, therefore, with renewed patience and a softened voice, that he replied (quietly keeping his seat, notwithstanding the reiterated warning he had received to quit it), "What you can mean, my good sir, about my daughter, is a great deal more than I have any power to guess. I have got no daughter; that is to say, no daughter born to me, though my good son Christopher has taken for his wife one that any

man might be happy to call daughter, and so well do I like the breed, that as far as I am concerned, I should make no objection to my son Charles being indulged in his fancy of giving me her niece for another daughter; but how you ever, sir, came to suppose that either Susan or Bessy should be under any apprehension about a claim from you, is what I never shall be able to understand, when it is most likely that neither of them ever heard your name in all their born days: and I can't but say, Mr. Dalrymple, that it is a poor sort of compliment to Miss Meddows, the orphan daughter of a person you appear to have considered as your friend, to run off in this wild manner from her affairs, in order to send such a very unaccountable message to my daughter."

"Mr. Chesterfield, I beg pardon; I fear, indeed, I have received you very strangely," replied Dalrymple, again changing colour; "but I have been hurried and harassed to day, dreadfully; and, to tell you the truth, I believe I was thinking of quite a different business. Will you have the kindness to excuse this? and will you enter at more length and with greater explicitness upon the business that brought you here?"

"Upon my word, sir, there is nothing I wish more than to explain my errand, and settle it satisfactorily to all parties; and for this purpose I think my best plan is to tell you plainly, and at once, that I am sent to you by Miss Meddows; though, for some reason or other, the dear young lady seems to wish that you should not know it."

"You are very kind, very kind indeed, Mr. Chesterfield! May I not offer you some refreshment? I recollect all about your family now, perfectly. And your son Charles is going to be married, is he, Mr. Chesterfield? I knew your son Charles extremely well when he was in London; and I am very glad he has made a choice that seems likely to please you. Is it an old attachment, Mr. Chesterfield?"

"Why, considering the age of the parties, I think I may say it is an old attachment, for I believe it is pretty well clear to us all now, that the love between them has been going on these two years; and truly, I am much obliged to you, Mr. Dalrymple, for remembering my boy so kindly. He made but a foolish sort of a business altogether of his journey to London, I know that, but I well remember his writing me word of the favour you had done him in asking him to breakfast."

"Yes, indeed, I perfectly remember his breakfasting with me, and a very fine promising young man he is. Do let me order you some refreshment, Mr. Chesterfield, and then we shall be able to talk at leisure of poor Sir George Meddows, and——his affairs."

"Well, sir, I won't refuse a crust of bread and a glass of beer, if you happen to have such a thing," replied the old man, again thinking his host handsome and grand-looking enough to make a fitting husband for his admired guest, and moreover very satisfactorily convinced that his thoughts had in good truth been wandering to some different concern when the conversation commenced so inauspiciously. "It was a blessing, at any rate, that I kept my temper," thought the old man, "and now I hope that all will go smooth with us."

Mr. Dalrymple now rang the bell, and when it was answered, not only ordered the servant to bring a tray, but strictly enjoined him not to let any person in whatever, as he was going to transact business that must on no account be interrupted. But before he referred to this business, concerning which he now appeared quite as anxious as the negotiator, he waited till sundry viands, accompanied by both wine and beer, were sat before his guest, and then, steadfastly

determined to learn all and every thing concerning Clara which the old man had power to tell, he led him to eat, to drink, and to talk, with a kindness of manner that was in very striking contrast with the style of his reception, as well as with the state of mind in which his visiter had found him.

"And my poor friend's daughter is with you, my good Mr. Chesterfield, is she? Upon my word, it will be a great satisfaction to me to hear some particulars about her. How comes it that she is not with her aunt? You know Mrs. Longuéville, I suppose?"

Mr. Chesterfield, who was very far from being a stupid old man, watched the "altered eye" of his young host, and remembering his own observations on Miss Meddows during the conversation which preceded his departure, determined, after having refreshed himself with a glass of excellent Scotch ale, and a bumper of Madeira, that the two young people should not be kept asunder by any misunderstanding as to why poor Clara was not with her aunt. He therefore replied, "The reason is one, Mr. Dalrymple, that does her honour, poor dear young lady! It is a piteous sight, sir, to see one so young, and so beautiful, and so little likely to

have been taught by her father, or her aunt either, what honesty was—it is a piteous, but a charming sight too, to see her, after such dreadful scenes as she has been passing through, thinking of nothing in the world about herself or her own comforts, but only how she might do her duty by every body."

Dalrymple's heart throbbed with a violence that almost choked him. "Thank God! She has met with a kind friend in you, Mr. Chesterfield. You, at least, sir, have known how to do her justice. I envy you. But go on, go on; I pray you let me hear all you know about her."

"Indeed, sir, I don't see any reason why you should not," replied the old man, raising to his lips the glass which Dalrymple had replenished. "And as it happens, I doubt if there is any body now living in the whole world that *could* tell you so much about her, as I can. I don't see why I should mince the matter, Mr. Dalrymple, but it is now as plain as possibly can be, to my mind, that from the very first, when Sir George made such an unaccountable fuss about taking my son Charles up to London, it was for no other reason upon earth, but because he thought he should be able to get at his legacy. As you knew Charles, Mr. Dalrymple, I take it for

granted that you must have heard speak of his legacy, sir?"

"Yes, sir, yes, I have indeed. But pray go on with what you were saying about Miss Meddows."

"Why, sir, she showed from the very first a goodness, and a wisdom too, that was quite astonishing. Poor thing! Poor young lady! It is terrible to think what she must have suffered in her mind, and she so nobly honourable too! But it is plain that she suspected *why* my poor foolish boy was invited, and she did her very best to stop his going, but he was in no way to hear reason then, nor to be affronted either, with all the cross, proud looks she took care to give him, with the very best of motives, as he is now ready enough to confess. But see how she behaved, Mr. Dalrymple, when she found she could not prevent his going. Why she was as kind to him as if he had been her equal, and never forgot any thing that she thought likely to be good and useful for him. But all that is nothing to what came after, as you shall hear, sir.—Why should I be ashamed to tell it? My son isn't the first, by many, that has fallen a prey to such a skilled and artful man as Sir George Meddows. In a word, Mr. Dalrymple,

to make a long story short, no sooner was my foolish boy of age, and his little fortune of four thousand pounds in his own hands, than Sir George contrived to do him out of it. As soon as this was accomplished, and not before, the silly fellow told his good friend, Miss Clara, of it, but without having the least notion, observe, that his money was in any danger. But the poor daughter knew better, that was plain; and what do you think she did, sir? Before ever Charles quitted the house, she went and got four thousand pounds out of her own fortune (she had but five in the world, Mr. Dalrymple) and bought it into the stocks again in his name, my Charles's name, and so sent him home again to us just as rich as he went, and, thank God! a great deal wiser."

Dalrymple with difficulty suppressed a groan, as he heard this explanation of a transaction which had caused him not only to withhold his friendship at a moment when it was so greatly wanted, but also to accuse her in his heart of hearts of being exactly the reverse of all she was. He rose from his chair, and walked about the room for a minute or two, and then reseating himself, again repeated, "Go on, sir, go on."

"Well, Mr. Dalrymple, it was not many days after this, before the finishing misery came, and her wretched father was brought home to her, killed in a duel. Her aunt it seems, whom I always thought was another Sir George in petticoats, her aunt wanted her to set off for France immediately, clawing away, I suppose, all they could lay their hands upon. But that was not a plan to suit Miss Clara. As her aunt persisted in going before any thing was really known about the affairs, the dear young lady bethought herself of my good wife and me, and wrote to ask if we would take her in, while she set things a little in order towards paying what was owing at Charlton, and just round about the Grange."

"But from what funds, Mr. Chesterfield, can Miss Meddows attempt to pay her father's debts? Does she not know that he died utterly insolvent?"

"She seems to know, sir, dear pretty creature, that he has gone on borrowing and taking up money, more a great deal than she can ever hope to see paid, but though she has been brought up so much among foreigners, she has a true English honesty and good sense too about her. We are in hopes, Mr. Dalrymple, that

the furniture and what trifle of stock there is at the Grange, may bring money enough just to pay the tradespeople, and that is what seems to lie the heaviest upon her heart, dear kind soul."

Again Dalrymple groaned in spirit as he remembered all his prejudice and injustice. "But you are so kindly frank with me now, Mr. Chesterfield," he said, "that I think I may venture without offence to ask you from what funds she intended to pay me?"

"Ah, sir!" replied the old man, shaking his head, and looking as well as feeling a little conscience-stricken; "my old tongue has already exceeded its commission, and the question you now ask is just, beyond all others, the very one she would least like I should answer. I am sure I meant her no harm by my plain speaking, and I trust in God I have done none."

"Mr. Chesterfield, I will be as frank with you as I wish you to be with me," replied Dalrymple. "I certainly most strangely misunderstood you at first, but the moment I really knew what you were talking about, I have had but one wish—namely, that we should most cordially act together for the benefit, for the protection, Mr. Chesterfield, of this most excellent but unfortunate young lady. And how—let your

excellent good sense answer me—how can this be done, if there be any concealments between us? Fear not that your confidence in me may do harm. You do not wish to serve Miss Meddows more ardently than I do."

"Well then, Mr. Dalrymple, you shall hear the truth, and nothing but the truth. When I found how badly money matters were likely to turn out with her, Charles, and I too, got to feel very uncomfortable, thinking what she had done about paying back what her father had been rogue enough to borrow, and so I told her. Whereupon she said that she could set my heart at ease about that matter, for it had turned out that Charles's money, which I suspect she thought had been borrowed to pay you, had never been disposed of, but was found in the slaughtered gentleman's pocket-book after his death. And sure enough it did set my heart at ease for a bit; but then I found, sir, that it was so very earnestly her wish and will that whatever her father left owing to you should be paid, that I found there was no chance of her being easy till this was done: and I can only hope that your claim is not a very heavy one; for that is the only chance there is of her having a penny left."

"I have no claim, my good friend," replied Dalrymple, but in a tone far different from that in which he first made the statement. "But it may perhaps," he added, in a voice not over steady, "it may be better that I should explain this to her myself; meanwhile, my dear sir, I cannot help feeling considerable anxiety about the course she is pursuing. Upon what legal authority does she act, Mr. Chesterfield? How can she undertake to sell, and to pay? Is she her unhappy father's executor?"

"That's what I don't know sir," replied the worthy farmer, looking a little alarmed. "I don't think she is likely to know much about the law herself, and I can't say that I have heard her mention that she has had any professional gentleman to tell her what she might, and what she might not do."

"We must take care, Mr. Chesterfield, that she does not follow the dictates of her own pure and honourable mind, with greater freedom than the law allows. I received a letter from Mrs. Longuéville before she left England, informing me that her brother had died without a will, and in great embarrassment, and also that his daughter had not administered to his effects. If this be so, your noble-minded client, Mr.

Chesterfield, must neither sell nor pay. I would advise you, my dear sir, to return with all haste to Gloucestershire, and put an immediate stop to any proceedings which may have been commenced relative to this projected sale. Meanwhile I will—I will delay my departure from England, Mr. Chesterfield, long enough to ascertain here, what the actual state of Sir George's affairs was at his death; and when I have ascertained this, I will communicate further with you."

"I shall be greatly comforted, Mr. Dalrymple, by having such assistance, for I won't make any secret of the fact, that I have more good-will than knowledge how to help her. But would it not be a great comfort to her, Mr. Dalrymple, if she could receive your good counsel in person? She who so well deserves that she should have for friends all that are good and honourable in the whole world, does not seem to have one. It strikes me that for the most part, her father's friends, and her aunt's friends too, by what I learn from my son Charles, were no ways likely to suit her taste; and with all her sweet temper and goodness, and I'm free to say that I don't believe any body ever had so much—she has got a touch of pride in her, Mr.

Dalrymple. But somehow, sir, I don't think that you, though you was so intimate with her father, can be of the same sort as most of 'em; and it seems to me that it would be but a friendly act, if you was to come to Maplebury, and give her your own judgment upon all these difficulties."

If instead of being one of the most straightforward and simple-hearted men in the world, Farmer Chesterfield had been the most subtile, he could not by possibility have framed a eulogy more calculated to ensure the effect he desired; not a word of it but went straight to the heart of his hearer: that heart which had dared to doubt the nobleness of Clara! But it was with no venomed sting that they pierced him; on the contrary, every searching syllable seemed to bring healing honey with it, making him feel, perhaps for the first time in his life, that he had felt it fully that happiness might yet be in store for him.

But how was he to answer the worthy farmer's frank invitation? By frankly saying he would accept it? Should he let Mr. Chesterfield go home, and tell Clara that the man who had so rudely broken off all intercourse with her, was coming to pay her a visit? It was not to

be thought of. No trembling envoy approaching a despot's throne, ever felt so sincere a desire to demonstrate profound deference in his homage, as Dalrymple did now, as he again ardently, yet timidly, conceived the hope of being permitted to approach the orphan daughter of the profligate and ruined Meddows. He fixed his eye silently on old Chesterfield for a minute, but it was kindly, and smilingly; and then he said, stretching out his hand towards him,

"You are surely right, my good friend, in thinking that it will be my duty to wait upon Miss Meddows, whenever I may have any intelligence to communicate that may be useful to her; and I will not fail to do so, Mr. Chesterfield. But as it must be very uncertain when I shall be able to do this, I would rather, if you please, not say any thing about my intention of visiting Gloucestershire to Miss Meddows. Will you have the goodness to promise that you will not name it to her?"

"Is that, sir, because you feel uncertain whether you shall come or not?" demanded the old man, with a feeling of deeper interest than he wished to display.

"No, Mr. Chesterfield," replied Dalrymple,

"that is not the reason; I wish for nothing more earnestly than to see Miss Meddows, and set her noble mind at rest about my fancied claims; but I shall be much obliged if you will give me your promise not to mention my intended visit."

"I give you my promise that I will not," returned the old man, perfectly satisfied, as it seemed, with Mr. Dalrymple's intended mode of proceeding. "But yet, sir," he continued, "it will be necessary, you know, that I should render to the young lady some account of our interview. I have a notion, somehow, that she will feel a good deal of anxiety to learn what has passed between us."

"Do you think so, Mr. Chesterfield?" said Dalrymple eagerly, while the colour mounted to his temples; but checking himself, he added very quietly, "Then have the kindness to inform her, sir, that I told you the accounts she wishes me to furnish are not yet ready, but that when they are properly made out she shall receive them."

A very few minutes more sufficed to finish the interview, which, notwithstanding its rough beginning, ended with very cordial good-will on both sides.

CHAPTER XIV.

All Things approach towards a Conclusion.

Whether Miss Meddows was satisfied or not with her friendly messenger's report of his embassy, did not appear; for no sooner had she received it, than, having once more repeated, "God bless you, sir, I thank you very gratefully," she retreated to her bed-room, and was seen again by no one for the next three or four hours.

Farmer Chesterfield felt a little embarrassed as to the manner in which he should contrive to obey Mr. Dalrymple's behest, and do absolutely nothing respecting the projected sale at the Grange, without leading Miss Meddows to be-

lieve that he was neglecting her interests. He feared her accustomed daily inquiries as to how the business was going on, but nevertheless he was very steadfastly determined that go on it should not; for without having any very clear idea of what he expected from the promised visit of his new acquaintance, he had a sort of mysterious faith in his power of setting every thing right, which it was more easy to rely upon, than explain.

One whole week passed on thus, laggingly enough; but fortunately for old Chesterfield's veracity, who had, as he expressed it, a great dislike to telling downright lies, Clara seemed to have lost much of the energy with which she had began her operations; and when, in answer to her languid inquiry of when the sale was likely to take place, he replied that as yet it was quite impossible justly to say, she sighed with so absent an air, as to leave it doubtful whether the feeling of sadness thus expressed arose from this uncertainty, or from some other cause.

Three days of the second week since the farmer's return from London had worn away, and his confidence in Mr. Dalrymple's promised assistance began to be considerably shaken, when,

as he was leaving his house after breakfast to visit some of his more distant fields, he perceived a travelling carriage drawing up at the distance of a few hundred yards from his house, and a gentleman sprung from it whom he instantly recognised as the individual with whom he had been closeted in London, and whom, at that moment, he more ardently desired to see than any other individual whatever.

For a mere matter-of-fact old rustic, Farmer Chesterfield appeared to have some very judicious notions as to the most favourable manner of arranging an interview between a lady and gentleman, concerning whom he had taken it into his head, that they had a good deal to say to each other. No sooner did he catch sight of Mr. Dalrymple than, instead of bustling forward to meet and welcome him, as a duller man might have done, he turned suddenly round, and by means of scrambling over some hurdles, made a short cut to the house, in time to call Bessy out of the parlour, where she was sitting *tête-à-tête* with Miss Meddows, and to order old Rachael to show into it the gentleman who had just opened the garden gate. This done, he took care to make it understood by the household, that Miss Meddows was

talking on important business with a person just arrived from London, and must on no account be interrupted. And then he very quietly betook himself to the orchard, determined to employ himself in an accurate examination of his leafless fruit-trees, till the *tête-à-tête* thus carefully protected in the parlour, should be over.

Old Rachael, meanwhile, performed the duty assigned her with great propriety; and having let the strange gentleman into the hall, opened the parlour-door, and shut it upon him when he had entered, exactly as she had been told to do.

Near to the pretty window which opened upon the orchard was stationed an arm-chair of magnificent dimensions appropriated by prescriptive right to the mistress of the house; but during her absence, Clara had taken possession of it, and now sat with her pale but beautiful cheek resting against the snow-white covering of its cushioned side, and her sad eyes settled with more of inward than outward speculation in them upon the checquered light and shade without. It was not the opening of the door which roused her from her revery, for if she heard it she noted it not; but this was fol-

lowed by a heavy breathing that seemed near her, and then Clara, turning her head, beheld Arthur Dalrymple standing almost close beside her.

She did not scream—she did not faint; but neither did she speak nor move, and her eyes once fixed upon the face of her most unexpected guest, she seemed to have no power of withdrawing them; almost the only symptom of her consciousness being that they were filled with tears. For half a moment Dalrymple stood as if intending to speak to her in an ordinary way, but he had no power to do it, and, dropping on his knee beside her, he seized her hand, and bending his head till his forehead touched that trembling hand, he very wisely permitted a moment of most eloquent silence to preface the history he had to tell. Either this silence, or the words which followed it, must have possessed peculiar clearness of explanation, for, considering how perfectly unexpected was all he said, nay, how totally in contradiction to all her foregone conclusions, it was quite wonderful how quickly and completely she understood him.

How long they remained together is not exactly known; but it is probable that the

interview was not a short one, for Farmer Chesterfield, though he had began the examination of his trees in the most slow and deliberate manner possible, had completed the task long before any indication appeared that the consultation in the parlour was over. So he quietly proceeded with his ordinary routine of morning business; and when he returned to dinner, he found Mr. Dalrymple lingering in the porch alone, waiting, as he said, to have the pleasure of shaking hands with him, and of giving him the very agreeable information that, from the various inquiries he had made, it appeared clear to him that it would be a very easy matter to pay all the tradesmen who had claims against the late Sir George Meddows without having recourse to any public sale whatever.

The well-behaved old man endeavoured to look as grave as a judge while he listened to this; merely observing that he was exceedingly glad to hear it, as it would save a great deal of trouble. He then very cordially invited Mr. Dalrymple to share their family dinner; but he was assured in return that this was impossible, inasmuch as several letters which were to be forwarded by that night's post were still to be written.—"But I shall be happy to take

tea with you, Mr. Chesterfield," added the young man, "if I may be permitted to do so."

Farmer Chesterfield did not appear to think that there was any objection to this, but, on the contrary, declared that they should be very glad to see him; whereupon they once again shook hands very cordially, and parted; the old man entering the house to join his family, and the young one taking his solitary way to the little inn to which he had been directed on entering the village as "the best in the place." What sort of a dinner he found there has never been recorded; but Mr. Dalrymple has been repeatedly heard to declare since, that this solitary walk and the solitary meal which followed it, were among the most delightful recollections of his life.

On entering the family sitting-room, where the dinner-table was already spread, old Chesterfield looked round with some anxiety to see if the usual party were all assembled, and perceived that all were there, save one; the sable robes and pale fair face of his lovely guest were not visible. But this circumstance did not in any wise seem to disturb the good farmer; on the contrary, he immediately undertook to make an excuse for her, volunteering the information

that Miss Meddows, to his certain knowledge, had letters to write, and that he should not wonder if she did not come down to dinner at all. But just as he concluded the sentence, the correctness of his information was rendered doubtful by the gentle entrance of the fair creature to whom it related.

Clara's place at table had always been between Charles and Bessy, each of whom seemed to assume a particular right to take care of her on all occasions; she now moved on to this accustomed place as usual, taking hold of the young girl's arm as she passed her, and pressing it with a degree of affection which not only produced an answering pressure in return, but caused Bessy to look up fondly in her face, as if to thank her for it. What was it she saw in that beauteous face to puzzle and almost startle her? There were no vehement feelings strongly written there—no feverish lustre in the eye—no dimpling smiles around the mouth—every feature was still in sweet harmonious repose; and if the soft cheek were a thought less pale than usual, its delicate tint had not more colour in it than might be seen on the extremest verge of a wild-rose leaf. And yet, not even Bessy, with all her unschooled ignorance, could look

at her without perceiving that she was no more like what she had been, than a young eagle, soaring in light and joy, was like one pierced by a poisoned shaft, and sinking with a drooping wing to the earth.

As to old Chesterfield, had he yielded to temptation, he would certainly have gone without his dinner, for the pleasure of gazing at her; for though every member of the family thought to themselves, as they looked at her, that she was beyond all doubt the most beautiful young lady in the world, and, somehow or other, looked a great deal more beautiful on that day than they had ever seen her look before, it was he alone who could give the slightest guess at the why and the wherefore, or comprehend that the indescribable halo which seemed visible about her arose from her feeling herself the happiest being that moved between the earth and heaven, instead of one to whom every thought had been a sorrow, and every sensation a pang. Poor Clara! She had in truth suffered bitterly; for, by a strange fatality, all her best and noblest qualities had, through nearly the whole of her short life, been continually at war with all that surrounded her, making her sometimes almost tremble at her own hardness, at

finding her wishes and her will in eternal opposition to the wishes and the will of those whom nature had given as her rulers and her guides. And, as it ever happens, now that this galling source of sorrow was removed, her past suffering became the measure of her present joy; and at last to know and feel herself valued and loved by Dalrymple, caused a perfection of happiness, which none who have not suffered can ever feel.

The loves of Clara and Arthur have not made a sufficiently important feature in this narrative to justify any lingering of the pen in describing at full length the happy conclusion at which they at last arrived. The good-natured reader may, however, very safely indulge himself or herself, as the case may be, in believing this to have been exactly all they could wish it. There was, however, a good deal of clever management necessary on the part of the gentleman, before the lady could be made aware of the absolute necessity of bringing things to a very rapid conclusion, in order to avoid the many inconveniences which must inevitably have arisen from delay. There was really much truth in this statement, lover-like as it was, and Dalrymple made the most of it. It was quite

certain that Clara's ignorance of English law had led her to invest herself with powers in the settlement of her father's affairs, to which she had no claim; and it was equally so that the safest and simplest means of setting all this right, was by *her husband's* taking out letters of administration, enabling him to dispose of whatever property there was, and permitting him without impropriety to supply all deficiencies left by these very inadequate funds from his own ample means.

For these excellent and unanswerable reasons, Clara Meddows became the bride of Arthur Dalrymple so speedily as to make her feel, as she said, as if the whole of this marvellous metamorphosis in her destiny had been the work of enchantment. Most of the friendly lookers on at Maplebury were considerably less astonished at all this than herself; but it may be a question whether she or they were most pleased when, among the numerous announcements of arrangements made, and business transacted, which every post brought, between the arrival of Mr. Dalrymple as a bachelor and his departure as a benedict, it was made known that the present Sir George Meddows had consented to sell the whole of his property at

the Grange, and that Clara's affianced husband was the purchaser.

Within two days after this, the marriage was solemnized in the parish church of Charlton, by the venerable Mr. Westbrook ; Farmer Chesterfield giving away the bride, and the happy Bessy officiating as bridesmaid.—On which joyful occasion Mrs. Chesterfield, the elder, gave one or two such very intelligible hints that her opinions had undergone a remarkable change respecting the eligibility of Bessy as a wife for her son Charles, that before the moon was fully risen on that night, the young pair were solemnly affianced to each other.

From the church door, Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple set off for Dover ; and after a leisurely and by no means unpleasant journey, arrived in Paris, where they were welcomed and felicitated by the elegant Mrs. Longuéville, with all the ardour which such a heart and soul as her's is sure to feel towards a niece so circumstanced as was the bride. Their residence in the gay capital was, however, not long; Italy was before them, with all her hoarded treasures of art, and all the eternal splendour of her sun ; and thither they repaired, among the very hap-

piest of the many happy, who employ their first long flight from home in crossing the stern fence with which nature has enclosed her favourite garden. Of all they did, and all they saw, there is no space to tell; but two such years as they passed in Italy, almost sufficed to make them forget that they had ever accounted themselves unhappy.

CHAPTER XV.

The Last.

Another two years must be permitted to pass before we return to take a final look at Charles Chesterfield, the youth of genius. Things had gone very differently with him from all he had wished and hoped at the bright moment when he took his seat in the dickey of Sir George Meddows' carriage, when he first left his quiet home for the spirit-stirring scenes of the great metropolis. It would be hardly too much to say that he had endured the disappointment of every hope which at that moment had caused his heart to swell, his blood to dance, and his eye to sparkle. But if there be any mixture of justice in human criticism,

the admirable strength of mind which enabled him to submit, without a single sigh of regret, to this unmitigated victory of fate over inclination, will be accepted as a stronger proof of his just claim to the honours of a hero, than any falling off in the qualities he had imagined for himself, can be against it. Not but what it may yet be shown, perhaps, late though it be, that had he been a "wilful man" he might, in some sort, "have had his way;" but historic truth enables the pen of his chronicler to rest his fame on much more comfortable grounds.

The house in Portman-square, of which it may be remembered that Mr. Dalrymple was wont to take so little heed, had now become a favourite residence with him for some months in every year. Not even at his old Scotch castle, well as they loved it, did the complexions of his children glow more brightly, or his lovely wife content his fastidious yearnings for English perfection more completely, than during these regular periodical returns to "the rank city."

It was in the course of one of these that the following scene took place.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Dalrymple were particularly attached to any of the Gibson family,

and to its fair chieftess they might be said to entertain rather a particular dislike; nevertheless, for the sake of that "country-neighbour" feeling which has been mentioned before, so much of London visiting was still kept up between them, as to ensure Mrs. Dalrymple's appearance at least once during every season at the weekly intellectual assemblings of Mrs. Gibson, which continued as heretofore to contain an unequalled variety of talent and notoriety.

Exactly four years after the name of Clara Meddows had been lost in that of Clara Dalrymple, it happened that at the exhibition of the Royal Academy in Trafalgar-square, a very distinguished looking group, consisting of two ladies respectively leaning on the arms of two gentlemen, attracted considerable attention, probably from the remarkable personal beauty of both the ladies, who, though in different styles, were certainly two as lovely women as could be seen any where, and on this occasion were without rivals, either on the modes, or before them.

There was also another group parading the rooms at the same time, composed of Mrs. Gibson, the two eldest Miss Gibsons, Mrs. Sherbourne, and Mr. Marchmont.

As "the Dalrymples" were decidedly the most brilliant stars in the fashionable line which had been ever brought to shine within the Gibson Galaxy, they never became visible to any of the race, without producing a very considerable degree of sensation, and much increase of fuss and bustle.

"Mamma! Mamma! Do you see?" exclaimed Miss Almeria, as she caught sight of the graceful figure of Mrs. Dalrymple fixed before one of the wonders of Landseer. "Pray don't let us stand here bothering about these stupid things in this room. The Dalrymples are exactly the people to follow about at an exhibition, they understand pictures so perfectly. They have lived so in Italy, that it would be absurd not to have a respect for their judgment. Do let us go into the next room, will you?"

"I have no sort of objection, my dear," returned her mamma, adding aloud in a voice of imposing authority—"Upon my word I don't know what the exhibition will come to. It decidedly gets worse and worse every year! What a dreadful bore it must be to people like the Dalrymples!"

"Who is it that she has got with her?" demanded the still great Regenerator, as he as-

sisted his ever faithful patroness and friend to make her way through the crowd, "he looks like a clergyman."

"Yes, certainly, it is a clergyman—I wonder who in the world it can be. Something distinguished, you may depend upon it; they are so tremendously exclusive, you know.—But there is Dalrymple himself—What a beautiful little woman he has got upon his arm! She too must be somebody, of course. Do contrive to make your way, my dear friend, through these idlers that are crowding round that picture of the Duke of Wellington, as if their lives depended upon who should get nearest to it. Upon my word and honour this exhibition is the vulgarest bear-garden in Europe! Pray push forward, Mr. Marchmont! Don't you see they are moving on? Almeria, look back for Mrs. Sherbourne and Theodosia—and make them a sign to follow us. Good Heaven! we shall never overtake them?"

After a good deal of violent exertion, Mrs. Gibson, Mr. Marchmont, and Miss Almeria did succeed, however, in overtaking the party of which they were in chase; but by the time they had reached it, the order of the group was changed, the clergyman being in possession of

the arm of the "beautiful little woman," and Mr. Dalrymple having that of his wife, who was detaining him for a moment to pass judgment upon the likeness of a portrait, before which they stood apparently in great admiration.

"My dearest Mrs. Dalrymple!—How enchanted I am to see you!" vociferated Mrs. Gibson, as she elbowed her last plunge through the crowd which had divided her from her valued friends. "What a mob! Isn't it dreadful? Mr. Dalrymple, I need hardly ask you what your opinion is of all these acres of canvas! You that have been so much abroad can have but one opinion about it."

"I am almost as much astonished as delighted, Mrs. Gibson," he replied; "and I confess I think it very likely that my having seen several exhibitions of modern pictures abroad may have something to do with the pride and admiration which I feel for those at home. There is no country in the world which can show a collection of modern paintings comparable in excellence to that which surrounds us here. The progressive improvement, too, is as striking as it is delightful."

"How beautifully patriotic that is, Mr. Dalrymple! and it is perfectly heroic too, when it

is so much the fashion to abuse every thing of the kind," returned Mrs. Gibson. "I was just saying to Mr. Marchmont that I must positively make my way to you, because it was such a treat to hear your opinion. Your word, he says, is law."

Thus amiably brought forward, Mr. Marchmont ventured a bow, and a smiling remark. Miss Almeria managed to thrust her hand within reach of Mrs. Dalrymple's, and the two parties remained for some minutes so completely together as to become one to the eyes of all beholders. This was exceedingly satisfactory to the Gibson portion of it; but Mrs. Dalrymple ventured to interrupt a rather long speech of Mr. Marchmont's by saying, "I fear, Arthur, that we shall lose our friends if we linger behind them any longer. Good morning, Mrs. Gibson—Good morning."

But when two parties have been thus joined together, it must be by the will of both that they are put asunder; and though Mrs. Dalrymple's onward movement was not impeded, she did not get beyond reach of Mrs. Gibson's very audible observations, Miss Almeria's affectionate familiarity, or Mr. Marchmont's sententious criticism.

At length the clergyman and the little beauty were overtaken, and a few steps more brought the united groups to a room comparatively free from the pressure of the crowd. It was then that Mrs. Gibson and Mr. Marchmont at one and the same instant recognised their old acquaintance Charles Chesterfield in the young clergyman who was now again honoured with the arm of Mrs. Dalrymple. For "one moment and no more," they both stood doubtful whether he was to be hailed as a dear and valued friend, or passed as an utter stranger. There could hardly have been given a more illustrious proof of the "excellent sympathy" which still existed between these faithful friends than the simultaneous movement with which each pressed the arm of the other, as they stepped forward and exclaimed as it were with one voice, "Mr. Chesterfield!"

As our hero had no reason in the world against acknowledging the acquaintance thus claimed, he returned the smiling salutation of both with perfect good-humour, and gave his ready hand in succession to the mother, daughter, and their illustrious friend, not only without reluctance, but with a sensation of

very natural delight at remembering how very greatly things were changed with him since he had enjoyed this honour last.—But this joy was from his heart, and did in no degree curl his lip.

"How long have you been in town, my dear Chesterfield?" demanded Mr. Marchmont, forgetting with admirable audacity all the circumstances of their last interview, and by no means without hope of getting some more contributions gratis. "I have been perpetually endeavouring to hear tidings of you—but all we have learnt about you is that you have become a clergyman and a benedict—I heartily wish you joy of both.—But tell me, my dear Chesterfield, is that very charming person the lady in question? Let me intreat to be presented immediately. It is only on seeing her that we can wish you joy properly."

Almost at the same moment that this request was made to Charles by the Regenerator, a similar one was performed by Mrs. Gibson to Mrs. Dalrymple. "Is it possible that I have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Charles Chesterfield?" said she, with great fervour. "How very fortunate I consider myself in having met her thus!—Pray introduce me, dearest Mrs.

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CALIFORNIA

Dalrymple! I cannot tell you how anxious I am to make her acquaintance."

These urgent requests being complied with, and the blushing Bessy (for the little beauty was no other) presented in form to the trio, Mrs. Gibson said, "And where are you, my dear Mrs. Chesterfield? I shall be delighted to have the happiness of calling upon you, and shall hope to catch you for one of my evenings."

"Mrs. Charles Chesterfield is staying with me, Mrs. Gibson," said Mrs. Dalrymple; "and we shall be very happy to see you in Portman-square, whenever it may be agreeable to you to call."

"I am delighted to hear it!" returned Mrs. Gibson, with great animation. "You must remember, my dear Mrs. Dalrymple, how exceedingly attached we all were to Mr. Chesterfield in his younger days, you know; and I trust you will not any of you refuse to give me the excessive pleasure of seeing the whole party on Tuesday next? Positively you must promise me, dearest Mrs. Dalrymple! My 'Paradise Lost' is at last entirely finished, and most superbly bound in forty-three volumes—and next

Tuesday it is to make one of my lions. It will be such a pleasure to show it to dear Mrs. Chesterfield! I may depend upon you, may I not? I do implore you not to disappoint me!"

Just as Mrs. Dalrymple was about to pronounce a favourable answer, the eye of Mrs. Gibson caught sight of her daughter Theodosia and Mrs. Sherbourne, approaching from the room they had just left; and feeling that the brilliancy of "her Tuesday" would run a very terrible risk if the latter lady made her appearance as one of her party, she turned suddenly round, and whispered in the ear of Almeria, "Stop her for God's sake!" The young lady's eye followed the direction of her mamma's, and feeling the importance of the command, she flew to obey it, in time to prevent the very lucky Charles Chesterfield from the disagreeable encounter, by leading the still soul-subduing little Sapho back into the great room before his eye had caught sight of her, or her subduing orbs had once more rested upon him.

"My dearest Mrs. Sherbourne!" said the young lady, in an accent of very tender sympathy—"For Heaven's sake sit down here for a minute or two. There are some people in the

other room that I am sure it would kill you to see. Sit down! Sit down, don't I tell you! For mercy's sake sit down."

"Oh Dio! Che dico? What mean you, love?" replied the poetess, throwing herself upon a bench, shaking back her ringlets, and suffering the identical old shawl of former days to fall from her still slippery shoulders, precisely after the manner of the years that were gone. "Who is it that I should thus dread to see? Speak, Almeria. Solve this fearful mystery."

"Charles Chesterfield!" whispered her sympathizing friend. It was a beautiful opportunity, and Mrs. Sherbourne instantly fainted; speedily becoming the centre of a group of smelling-bottles, and a crowd of eyes; in which condition Mrs. Gibson and Mr. Marchmont had the gratification of taking possession of her, after having seen the Dalrymple party safely descending the stairs.

This was the nearest approach to a meeting with his only infidelity, which ever befel our fortunate hero. Yet, more than once did he and his thrice happy little wife enjoy the hospitality of Portman Square; for the friendships began during Clara's short, but eventful visit at Maplebury farm, continued to unite the

families of Dalrymple and Chesterfield for more than one generation; and the presentation to an excellent living close to Mr. Dalrymple's Herefordshire residence, cemented this friendship by the additional ties of patronage and close neighbourhood.

Need it be added, that the good farmer and all his race had their share in all the honour and happiness of this close union? In truth, there were ties of mutual obligation, and mutual gratitude, which bound them all together in a bond of union, as firm in its nature as precious in its effect; and Mrs. Dalrymple often quotes her early averseness to Charles Chesterfield's visit to London, as a proof how little mortals know what events are good, and what evil, for them—to which excellent observation our Youth of Genius has been more than once heard to reply, that most unquestionably there were cases in which disappointment was ten thousand times preferable to success.

THE END.

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